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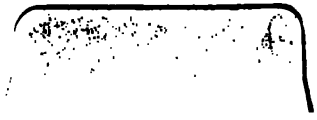
MISS MYSTERY

ETTA ANTHONY BAKER



MISS MYSTERY

With an inarticulate cry she threw herself into his arms.
FRONTISPIECE. *See Page* 351.

LIT

With an inarticulate cry she threw herself into his arms.
FRONTISPIECE. *See Page* 351.

MISS MYSTERY

A NOVEL

BY

ETTA ANTHONY BAKER

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
WILSON C. DEXTER

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1913

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TO THOSE WHO THINK THAT A
FORTUNE WOULD NOT MAKE
FOOLS OF THEM, I DEDICATE
THIS STORY OF A FAMILY
THAT THOUGHT LIKEWISE,
BUT FAILED TO PROVE IT.

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MISS MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

OUT OF THE NOWHERE

"I came . . . . .
Into this Universe, and WHY not knowing,
Nor Whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing . . ."

Had any one dared to prophesy that such a mysterious occurrence, verging closely upon actual melodrama, could happen within the sedate precincts of St. George, loyal residents would have greeted the prophecy with pitying smiles. Yet it did happen, and what is more, it effectually aroused the whole suburb from its listless lethargy. It was no nine days' wonder, either; at the end of that period St. Georgians had not finished threshing out the first approaches to the mystery, nor at the end of nine weeks, even! By that time their curiosity was well whetted, not so much by any definite discovery, as by the elimination of so many possible clues that it seemed almost inevitable that the right one must turn up at any moment.

Even its detractors could not refer to St. George as "a city of the unburied dead," yet it could scarcely be called an exciting place of residence; but

then, it was near enough to New York to make excitement of its own unnecessary. Conservative schedules placed it twenty-five minutes distant from the city, but enthusiastic commuters unblushingly reduced the time to fifteen, and these same enthusiasts were wont to boast that it formed a part of the great metropolis, even though a league or so of sparkling sea-water separated it from that delectable expanse of sky-scraper-crowned, theater-crowded territory.

It was a pretty suburb, with many hills and wide, tree-shaded avenues. More than one stately, pillared mansion graced the water front or stood out commandingly upon the surrounding heights; but these relics of a long gone colonial period were mere shells of departed grandeur, the "Has Beens," as Chester Porter scathingly termed them. The homes were, for the most part, roomy frame houses set in a liberal allowance of well-kept lawn.

Among these the Porter house was noticeable for its air of old-fashioned cheeriness. On the day in early autumn when "it" happened, the day when St. George was stirred to its very depths by an episode hitherto undreamed of in the annals of its uneventful existence, the old house seemed set in a glowing background of pure golden sunshine, that made its hospitably wide-flung glass doors and long, shady piazzas present a most inviting appearance of calm restfulness.

A large garden surrounded the house. Back of the trim hedge that formed its street boundary was displayed a decorous arrangement of cannas, geraniums and foliage plants dear to suburban hearts.

The salvia beds that edged the front piazza were a scarlet glory — one of autumn's best efforts in the color line. At one side of the house, this geometric exactitude gave place to a riotous mingling of old-fashioned posies,— asters, hollyhocks and marigolds, petunias and sweet-williams, cosmos and chrysanthemums.

Among these blossoms Mrs. Porter moved with loving appraisement, making one or two final additions to the gay mass of autumn flowers that filled to overflowing the basket swinging from her arm. She was a plump, comfortable-looking matron, with an aspect of placid contentment that was reflected by her surroundings or was a reflection from them. As she adjusted her flowery burden to her satisfaction and turned towards the house there sounded a hurried scramble among the bushes on the other side of the high fence which formed the boundary between the Porter place and that of their nearest neighbors, the Chamberlins.

"That you, Mrs. Porter?" A clear young voice hailed her from behind the barrier. "Any one on deck yet?"

Before she had time to reply, a merry face peeped over the fence like a new and attractive variety of Jack-in-the-box. It was followed by a slender girlish form, as its owner swung herself to the top with the ease of long practice, and balancing lightly on her precarious perch, settled her racquet across her knees with scrupulous care. She was an athletic specimen of young womanhood in spite of her slender litheness; her face showed the glow of health even

through its sun-kissed brown. There was an alert air about her that proclaimed the sheer joy of living, for to Marjory Chamberlin it was enough simply to be alive on such a glorious day.

No one ever referred to Miss Chamberlin as pretty; she was either "handsome" or a "beauty." Her fluffy dark hair was simply parted and drawn into a loose knot low on her neck, where a pert bow of black velvet was perched with jaunty erectness. The flashing dark eyes belonged to no meek Griselda, and their effect was heightened by the poise of the small head, which proclaimed that its owner had a will of her own, a proclamation never denied even by Marjory's admirers. Yet the dark eyes could be wistful at times, and the laughing lips could droop appealingly, only, so far, life had dealt gently with her; there had been few occasions for either wistfulness or appeal.

"Thank goodness! No one's heaving in sight yet!" she exclaimed with satisfaction, after a swift survey up and down the avenue. "Excuse the nautical flavor in my conversation, won't you? We've just been watching the warships come in. I waited until twenty-four went by and the line still reached clear through the Narrows. I feel sorry for any one who tries to tackle Uncle Sam! Those big gray monsters ought to settle things in short order. To-day's the 'W. P. C.' powwow, isn't it? Aren't the ladies late? I thought club women were punctuality personified."

Mrs. Porter smiled up into the bright face above her, as she corrected gently: "The Executive

Board of the club meets here at three-thirty. It's only three now, I think."

"I'll have plenty of time to dress, then. We were having an exciting match — the tournament, you know — when the big guns began to salute. We couldn't resist, so we waited to finish up afterwards. I'll have to rush now, though." She scrambled down as she spoke, and started up the path.

"No, you won't, dear." Mrs. Porter's voice arrested the flying figure. "There's plenty of time. We don't serve the tea until five. But come in whenever you're ready. I do hope they won't be late," she added a trifle anxiously, peering up and down the wide, tree-shaded avenue. "We have several important questions to discuss to-day, and arguing wastes so much time."

"I should say it did," Marjory called back, "when you have a prize wrangler like Mrs. Thorne. But you can handle her, even if you don't go into spasms over everything. Do you know, your W. P. C. Board always seems like

> 'Twelve good women and true,
> Where only eleven would do!'"

"You're mistaken, Marjory. I know you dislike Mrs. Thorne — she is disagreeable at times — but she'll work for a measure after it's put through even though she opposed it with might and main. Not many women do that, now do they?"

"No, they don't. Give the — Thorne her due. There's some one coming now! Good-by!"

With a light laugh she blew a kiss to her neighbor

and disappeared. When she emerged, half an hour later, she was a transformed Marjory. The short-skirted tomboy with the jaunty velvet bow in her girlishly arranged hair had given place to a demure young lady, with hair piled high on the top of her head and a filmy lingerie gown floating airily about her, now concealing, now displaying the high-heeled white slippers. She entered the Porter grounds by the back gate, and not wishing to disturb the committee meeting of the Woman's Philanthropic Club — commonly referred to as the W. P. C.— of which Mrs. Porter was president, slipped in at the side door without knocking. When Mrs. Porter glanced into the dining-room later, she was putting the finishing touches to the table on which stood a huge silver tray holding a quaint chased tea-service that had belonged to generations of Porters. It was Marjory's special delight.

"There! Now it looks just right!" she was saying in complacent tones to Katy, her helper, as she deftly rearranged a cut-glass nappy filled with sliced lemon, and placed a plate of tiny, delicately browned crullers near the fern which formed a fairy-like centerpiece. "Don't those open-faced sandwiches look good, though! I do hope they won't eat them all; I love them!"

Katy blushed with delight. The "open-faces" were a specialty of hers.

"Meeting over?" Marjory questioned, as Mrs. Porter appeared in the doorway. "Are the twelve ready for some liquid refreshment?"

That lady made a wry face.

"Not yet. Just listen! Does it sound like it?"

They both laughed as an outburst of excited argument fell upon their ears; then Mrs. Porter shook her head and added, soberly: "I'm afraid I'll have to hurry back."

"Take the oil can with you," Marjory suggested; "they seem to have sailed into troubled waters. So Mrs. Thorne got here after all; with the same old chip on her shoulder, too! I hoped she'd leave it up in Maine or wherever she went. Didn't her summer vacation 'gentle' her any?"

"Not so's you'd notice it — I mean — dear! dear!" Marjory laughed at the comical dismay on Mrs. Porter's face. "See what comes of having slangy boys in the house! Mrs. Thorne is a little difficult to deal with, I confess. A woman like that needs to be handled with gloves, that's all."

"Want Chester's baseball mitt?" Marjory asked, with a mischievous laugh, as her eye lighted upon some of the possessions of the youngest Porter, which, as usual, were in evidence all over the hall. "I'd like to use his bat on her myself, she's such a 'know-it-all'!"

"Sh! Sh!" Mrs. Porter raised a warning finger and tried to hide a smile at the girl's vindictive vehemence. "We're talking over plans for a Boys' Club, but we can't do much about it unless we have suitable rooms. You see we don't dare turn them loose in our club hall. It's no place for basket-ball or gymnastic work, anyhow. I'm very anxious to start this club. There are so many pitfalls for growing lads, it seems to me." The mother showed in the

anxious sigh that ended her words. Her older son, Winthrop, now a full-fledged contractor, had never caused her a moment's serious uneasiness, but Chester, a hot-headed lad of sixteen, was fast becoming a problem.

When Mrs. Porter, closely followed by Marjory, reëntered the parlor, the burning question of suitable quarters for a Boys' Club had been laid upon the table, and an animated conversation on everything under the sun, particularly the St. George sun, was in full swing. She promptly called the meeting to order and re-opened the discussion.

At the end of the afternoon matters stood just where they were at the beginning. The members all acknowledged the crying need of the new hall, but no one was able to suggest a plan whereby the necessarys funds would be forthcoming. Mrs. Porter persisted, however, and adjourned the meeting with the words: "We'll manage it somehow because we must! If we can't get it any other way, we'll have to earn it piecemeal!"

When the ladies started up-stairs after the tea was over, Mrs. Thorne began to give voluble details of a suffrage convention she had attended the previous week.

"And why shouldn't we vote?" she demanded aggressively. "Is there anything the men can do that we women can't do as well or even better?"

Her glance from one to another was a challenge, but no one picked up the gage. They had not yet succeeded in throwing off the inertia of the summer's vacation. It had been an effort, on such a

glorious day, to take up even their beloved W. P. C. plans, earnest as they were in its good work.

"We women of to-day are self-sufficient," Mrs. Thorne went on oratorically. "We don't need the men. Just give us a chance and we'll prove— What was that?"

They all heard it. They had secured parasols and purses, and were moving towards the stairs, but it brought them to a halt with the precision of a squad of militia. For an instant there was dead silence, as startled faces looked at one another inquiringly, but no one offered an explanation of the weird, moaning sound that floated down faintly from the regions above.

"Perhaps Bugs has been shut up in Chester's den," Marjory volunteered finally. "It didn't sound like a dog, though, did it?"

"It didn't sound like anything earthly," her sister-in-law replied, with an involuntary shiver. "Is any one up in the third story?"

"No!" Marjory replied positively. "Katy was busy in the kitchen when I came up-stairs, and Chester's over at the tennis courts."

"Perhaps it's some other animal shut in up there," one of the ladies ventured in a timid whisper.

"Then some one ought to go up and release it." Mrs. Thorne settled the case conclusively. "Where's Joe?"

Joe was handy-man for the whole neighborhood, a sturdy Swede whom nothing could ruffle.

"He's working in the Park to-day," Marjory replied. "I don't see how any animal could get in

without being seen. I know what it is — it's doves!"

With a laugh she started impetuously up the dusky flight leading to the third story, but descended with reckless precipitancy when another sobbing wail, fainter than the first, throbbed through the air. Her face showed a frightened pallor even through its summer coat of tan, such an uncanny sound it was!

"It's a lunatic escaped from some asylum," Mrs. Thorne announced from her haven at the turn of the first flight of stairs. As usual she spoke with absolute positiveness.

Marjory greeted this new suggestion with a nervous laugh.

"A lunatic!" she muttered disdainfully. "I should say it would be a lunatic to beard a woman's club meeting in its den!"

"I'm going to telephone for a policeman," Mrs. Thorne went on hurriedly, ignoring Marjory's jibe if she heard it at all. For a self-sufficient woman she appeared strangely agitated. Mrs. Porter, just starting up the stairs, noted the fact, and her keen blue eyes twinkled with mischief in spite of her attempt at gravity.

"Why do we need a policeman?" she inquired mildly. "Surely thirteen women are equal to one man, either a policeman or a lunatic!"

She had been in time to hear the second mournful wail, and as she spoke she marched determinedly towards the third-story stairs and began to mount them with the unhurried precision of a stout woman. Chester's room was in the third story; that some boy-

ish device of his was at the bottom of the weird sound seemed a foregone conclusion to his mother. The others, fired by her intrepid example, crowded after her, all except Mrs. Thorne, whose progress was impeded by an obstinate shoe-lace. By the time she succeeded in adjusting it to her satisfaction, the advance guard had gained the head of the stairs.

The fading light came in dimly through a high round window at the extreme end of a broad central hallway. There were several doors on either side, but all were closed except one, leaving the place in comparative darkness. Mrs. Porter paused in the hall and listened intently, while the rest of the ladies held their breath in the tension of the moment, but no sound broke the stillness. Then she threw wide the first door on the right, the one that stood ajar, and stepped in.

It was Chester Porter's den, a large room with an alcove, in which were the bed and chiffonier. On the door hung a small white placard with the suggestive invitation:

"Come in without knocking.
Go out the same way!"

The array of nondescript articles on the shelves, tables, and walls gave it more the appearance of a museum or a sportsman's show than an ordinary bedroom. In the corners were stacked an assortment of boyish treasures, all showing the energetic tastes of their owner: baseballs, bats and gloves, tennis racquets in all stages of preservation, fishing-rods, hockey sticks and skates. Over the mantel were fastened

both ski and snowshoes, while from the chandelier dangled a composite ornament, made up of a pigskin, and a basket-ball, with pendants of nose and head guards. A camera and a developing outfit littered the table. The walls were gay with pennants and posters, above which a frieze of Saturday Evening Post ladies looked down smilingly or haughtily upon the beholder, completely eclipsing several virtuous mottoes worked in red cross-stitch, on silver cardboard, extolling the advantages of punctuality, politeness, obedience, and kindred characteristics dearer to boyish hearts in the breach than in the observance.

At first glance the room seemed empty, but Marjory's quick eye detected something in the alcove. She darted past Mrs. Porter, but stopped with a startled gasp and stood staring at the bed in wide-eyed amazement.

As Mrs. Porter crossed the room she stumbled over some object on the floor. It proved to be a small brown leather traveling bag, but in her anxiety to ascertain the cause of Marjory's startled cry, she pushed it aside with her foot and hurried into the alcove. After one glance at the bed she turned towards the others, her finger on her lip to enjoin silence. Thus reassured, they crowded after her, breaking into subdued exclamations of surprise and pity.

What they saw was a slip of a girl apparently about eighteen or twenty, dressed in a dark, tailored suit, gloved, but hatless. She was lying flat on the bed with arms outstretched, her head flung back, the

heavy-lidded eyes slightly open. No lightest breath stirred the softly rounded bosom: the slender form lay motionless.

The corpse-like rigidity of the figure, the waxen pallor of the sunken cheeks, and the staring eyes were too much for Marjory.

"Oh! she's dead! She's dead!" she cried wildly. "Poor, poor little thing! Why didn't we come sooner! We might have saved her."

"She's not dead, Marjory!" Mrs. Porter spoke sternly to quiet the paroxysm of nervous sobbing into which the girl had fallen. With practiced touch she laid her hand upon the stranger's breast, but could detect no heartbeat. Snatching a small shaving mirror from the chiffonier behind her, she held it close to the white, set face. The faintest suspicion of moisture showed upon its surface, but it was enough to reassure her. She began to loosen the stranger's garments.

"She has fainted — exhaustion, probably; she looks as though she had been through a long sick spell, poor little creature! I wonder who she is! And how do you suppose she ever found her way up here? Call Katy, dear! She may know something about it."

Katy responded to the summons with suspicious promptitude, expressing unbounded surprise at the sight of the unbidden guest. She broke into voluble denial of any knowledge of the mystery.

"I never seen her before in all my born days, ma'am, sure I did not! I don't never let nobody into the house, Mis' Porter. She must 'a' slipped up-

stairs while you was havin' the meetin'. I'll go right down an' tel'phone for the hurry-up waggin."

"The what, Katy?" Mrs. Porter demanded sharply. She was bending over the slight form on the bed, chafing the cold hands, from which she had removed the heavy tan walking gloves, while Marjory, at her command, was endeavoring to unlace the tan ties that covered the small feet, but her hands were trembling with excitement she tried in vain to conquer, so that she was not making much headway.

"Why, the hospital waggin, ma'am!" Katy explained in surprise. "The amb'lance. I'll git 'em here in a jiffy. It's a pity, ain't it — such a sweet lookin' young lady!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" Mrs. Porter's voice arrested the maid as she was hurrying out. "She needs immediate attention, though. Telephone for Dr. Guthrie, Marjory. Katy, bring me the brandy, then fill the hot-water bottle. Hurry!"

Both girls flew to obey. Marjory returned in a short time with the news that she had intercepted the doctor just as he was leaving one of the neighboring houses.

"He's coming up-stairs now," she added excitedly. "Here he is!"

Mrs. Porter relinquished the attempt to administer another dose of brandy and turned with outstretched hand, to greet Dr. Guthrie. He was a tall, well-built man of middle age, handsome in face, gruff in voice, and abrupt in manner, but with the kindest heart in the world. The latter possession he made valiant efforts to keep in hiding and succeeded fairly

well with the world at large, but by the favored few who were keen enough to pierce beneath the abrupt manner and gruff tones, he was frankly worshiped.

With a curt nod of greeting to the ladies, he bent over the still figure on the bed and began a rapid examination, while the onlookers watched his every movement with bated breath. First he opened wide the partially closed eyelids with their fringe of long, curling, dark lashes, and peered intently into the pupils of the eyes, testing them for reaction to light. Then he lifted the white hand falling inertly over the side of the bed, and laid his ear close to the girl's heart.

"If you ladies will kindly retire," he announced at the close of his examination, "I'll see what can be done. I'll be glad of your help, Mrs. Porter. Wait a moment, Marjory! I need some medicine from the drugstore at once. Here!" He produced a small prescription pad and a fountain pen, and dashed off a few words followed by mystic symbols. "My man's in town: I want this rushed. Wait a minute, young lady! It's the medicine I want rushed, not my motor! Don't speed, understand! I saw you driving young Palmer's runabout the other day, and the way you turned the corner was a caution. I don't want you to drive my car in that fashion, unless I double the insurance."

Without even a pout of protest against the hard-hearted edict, Marjory seized the prescription and sped down the stairs, two steps at a time, her thoughts with the mysterious stranger in Chester's den. When she returned with the medicine, the ladies had taken

a reluctant departure but had stopped at the gate to discuss the case anew, loath to leave with their curiosity ungratified. Up-stairs, she found the sick girl breathing more regularly, though not yet fully restored to consciousness. She was settled comfortably among the pillows, the tiny form almost lost in one of Mrs. Porter's ample nightgowns. Gazing at her with pitying eyes, Marjory noted the short boyish rings that clung close to the small head, their gold a marked contrast to the long curling dark lashes, resting upon the emaciated cheeks.

"Will she live?" she whispered breathlessly.

The doctor shook his head.

"Impossible to give a definite prognosis of the case, owing to the patient's insensibility," he replied shortly.

At the end of an anxious half hour the doctor's efforts were rewarded. The oval face began to lose its deathly pallor and take on the first faint flush of returning consciousness. Suddenly the heavy white lids flew wide. The watchers held their breath in suspense as the great blue eyes glanced about the room, with nothing of excitement or even of anxiety in their depths — only a look of inquiry. Then the stranger gave a contented little sigh and fell into a natural sleep.

"Best thing in the world for her!" the doctor exclaimed, with evident satisfaction in his tones. "Close call, that! Too confoundedly close! Just let her sleep: better than medicine in a case like this."

Mrs. Porter and Marjory acquiesced, although they longed to learn the solution of the mystery. Theirs

was a kindly curiosity, however, so they possessed their souls in patience to wait for the end of the restoring sleep.

"How did she get that?" The doctor pointed to a good-sized contusion on the side of the girl's head. "She was evidently in a weakened condition before, but that put the finishing touch, if one can speak of a blow such as that must have been as a touch."

Mrs. Porter shook her head helplessly.

"What made her so run down? Been through typhoid?"

"I don't know. I—"

"Has she a strong constitution ordinarily?" he persisted.

"We never saw her before, doctor!" Mrs. Porter and Marjory spoke in perfect accord.

The doctor stared at them as though he thought they needed his ministrations more than the patient.

"Never saw her before?" he repeated incredulously. "Who is she? Where did she come from? What's she doing here?"

"We don't know! We don't know! We don't know!" Marjory answered all three questions with mischievous relish. "You tell us and we'll tell you."

A glance at Mrs. Porter's face confirmed Marjory's words.

"Well! well! well! This is a — never heard of such a thing! Don't see how —" The doctor resorted to detached exclamations from inability to express himself coherently.

"She's a treasure-trove, doctor," Marjory whispered eagerly. "She came, she saw — or rather we

saw and were conquered! She's a pretty little thing, though, even if she is so thin and white. I'll warrant she looks entirely different when she's well."

"She'll be surprised when she wakes up and finds she's in the wrong house," Mrs. Porter added. "I feel sure she was coming to visit some one here in St. George. Too bad to meet with such a dreadful mishap, isn't it?"

The doctor's thoughtful gaze was fixed upon the quiet sleeper. He nodded assent, however.

"No matter who she is or where she was going, she'll need a good, long rest," was his frowning comment. "If it's only that!" he muttered under his breath.

But the prediction as to the newcomer's embarrassment at finding herself in strange quarters proved wrong. When she awoke, half an hour later, she gave a long, restful sigh and gazed calmly about the room, with no trace of embarrassment or even of surprise in her face. Marjory had not been able to tear herself away from the fascinating mystery, at least while her curiosity was still unsatisfied. She and Mrs. Porter were sitting near the window, talking in low tones, but both were watching the quiet sleeper as they talked. Mrs. Porter hurried to the bed and was greeted by a smile that disclosed two big dimples in the girl's thin cheeks, and brought an answering twinkle into her own eyes, it was such a radiant, contented smile.

"Feeling better now, dearie?" she asked gently, as she stooped over to tuck the snowy blanket about the slight form with motherly touch.

A nod was her only answer.

"I'm glad of that. You were completely done up. You'll have to stay quiet for a while, but don't worry! We'll let your friends know that you are all right. Where were you going when you came in here to rest?"

The girl made no reply, unless the wistful little smile could be construed into an answer, or the appealing look straight into the kind eyes so near her own.

"Were you going to visit some one here on the avenue?" Marjory demanded breathlessly. "We want to telephone your people, so they won't be worried about you, you know."

The doctor, who had left to finish his afternoon round, entered the room in time to hear Marjory's question. He strode hurriedly into the alcove, his keen eyes fixed in anxious scrutiny on the stranger's face; but though she gazed straight at Marjory while the latter was speaking, she made no attempt to reply. A strained, anxious look blotted out the wistful smile, however.

"What is your name, dearie?" Mrs. Porter inquired, in the coaxing accents one uses to a little child.

The girl thought for a moment with frowning intentness, then shook her head hopelessly, while slow tears filled the big eyes and rolled down the white cheeks. It was too much for tender-hearted Mrs. Porter. Her own eyes dimmed as she gathered the slight form into her arms and held it close, patting the quivering face with soothing touch. "Never

mind, child!" she murmured reassuringly. "Don't cry! We won't bother you any more while you're so worn out. It will all come back to you as soon as you are rested, won't it, doctor?"

"We hope so! We hope so!" was the non-committal reply so dear to the professional heart, but the doctor's voice was singularly devoid of hope, in spite of its assumed briskness. Mrs. Porter knew him too well to be deceived. Nevertheless it was in wonderfully gentle tones for so gruff a man, that he himself put several questions to the interesting invalid. A nod rewarded his inquiry: "Feeling better, now?" but when he asked: "Did you come from New York? Were you on your way to visit friends?" the big blue eyes looked steadily into his kindly face: the pretty head with its aureole of boyish curls moved uneasily from side to side, but no faintest sound rewarded his efforts.

"Don't disturb her by further questioning until she's stronger," he commanded Mrs. Porter in a low-toned aside. "A concussion is always a serious matter, and this one — well, time will tell," he ended, with a significant shrug.

"It must have been caused by a dreadful blow," Mrs. Porter commented, with a sympathetic shiver.

"It was," he agreed grimly. "I noticed some reddish colored dust in her hair when I was examining the contusion, and concluded that she must have been hit by a brick. It had happened just before I was called in; I saw that at a glance. I remembered the new chimney they are building at the corner and stopped to speak to the workmen about it. They ac-

knowledged that they had been tossing the old bricks down, but claimed that they had waited, each time, until the coast was clear. Just as I was coming away, though, I made a find which settles the cause of the accident definitely."

He walked over to a chair near the door and held up a hat of rough, dark blue straw, harmonizing perfectly with the blue serge, tailored suit that hung over the back of the chair. They examined it closely. If further corroboration were needed, a break in the side of the brim supplied it.

"She's still suffering from the effects of the concussion, you see," the doctor explained. "Her faculties are benumbed, partially, at least. She'll need rest and quiet for the present."

"But she seems to understand what we say," Mrs. Porter reminded him in troubled tones.

The doctor nodded and went on, unconsciously raising his voice from the subdued tone he had used at first.

"I'd like to watch this case closely; it promises interesting developments. Trouble of this kind manifests itself in all sorts of ways — er — that is — it's a peculiar case, I fear. She may regain her memory shortly, and then again she may not. The chances are ten to one in favor of the latter, I regret to say. As you see, she's evidently convalescing from a serious illness, which complicates matters. Too bad we don't know who she is, but we'll hear tomorrow, probably. I'll telephone the hospital to send the ambulance at once, however. Please wrap —"

His directions were brought to an abrupt close by

a movement from the girl on the bed. She had been lying back placidly among the pillows, pale and emaciated but still a picture of comfort and content, until the doctor's words reached her ears. Suddenly a look of alarm spread over her face. She tried to rise in spite of Marjory's detaining hand, but fell back exhausted. Mrs. Porter hurried to her side and bent over her in motherly solicitude. The girl flung her arms about her neck, burying her face in the ample bosom and clinging to her in a frenzy of quivering terror.

"There! there! dearie! It's all right! I'll take care of you!" Mrs. Porter patted the curly head with tender touch, soothing the distressed little creature with low-voiced promises as she would a frightened child. "Never mind! never mind! They shan't take the girlie away, indeed they shan't! We won't even let them into the house. Come, honey, lie down now, that's a dear! You'll make yourself worse again, I'm afraid."

Thus reassured, the pitiful trembling of the slight form ceased, and the girl was gently laid back among the pillows, still keeping a nervous clutch upon Mrs. Porter's plump hand, however. With a grateful smile into the motherly face bending over her, she lay quiet with closed eyes, and in an incredibly short time was once more fast asleep, worn out by her paroxysm of fear.

"We'll keep her here," Mrs. Porter said firmly, stroking the frail fingers that still clutched her hand.

"But, my dear lady," the doctor expostulated, "you don't know what you are undertaking. We'll

probably find her friends or relatives to-morrow, but if we don't — Do you realize that it may be weeks before she recovers enough to speak, if she does then?" he added with deliberate significance. "You can't burden yourself with an unknown invalid for an indefinite period: it — it's quixotic!"

"I don't care what it is," she replied stubbornly, brushing the soft rings back from the white forehead with gentle strokes as she spoke. "I certainly won't send a little, frightened waif like this away. Why, she's scarcely more than a child — not over twenty, surely, if she's that old! Didn't you see how the mere mention of a hospital upset her? I couldn't do it! I couldn't! I don't care what any one says!"

"But your sister-in-law? What will she say?" the doctor questioned tentatively. "Won't she object to turning the house into a sanatorium — for a total stranger, too?"

"Mig knows that when I decide to do a thing, I do it," she replied quietly, adding with a humorous twinkle in her eyes: "I seldom take a stand, as you know. My motto has been 'Peace at any price'— almost!"

"But the girl would get the best of care at the hospital," he reminded her. "It's not 'turning her away' by any means."

"I know. I beg the hospital's pardon! But I promised to keep her here, doctor, so that settles it. Just see! she's still clinging to my hand! And she trusted me, or she wouldn't have gone to sleep again! Indeed I won't send her away, not a bit of it!" she murmured in caressing tones. Marjory clapped her

hands softly and danced a jig of pure elation, behind the doctor's back: the decision was evidently a pleasing one to her.

"Very well! On your own head be it!" he replied grimly, but there was a satisfied look on his face that belied his words. "It's an unusual case as I told you before, and I'm interested in it. I shall consider the patient mine. In fact I almost hope her friends don't turn up for a while — not until I see how the case develops, at least. I'm selfish enough to want to keep it to myself. But I feel sorry for you when a certain lady goes on the war-path!"

"You don't understand Mig, doctor," she assured him with a smile. "She's good, sweet meat once you get beneath that prickly shell of hers."

"Yes, if you ever do without getting clawed!" he retorted.

Middle-aged St. George was well aware that he had made more than one attempt when he and Mig Porter were little more than boy and girl together. Whether he still bore the marks was a subject of frequent discussion even yet. At least he had remained a bachelor, although it would not have been difficult to find a mistress for his handsome home. The master himself would have proved no drawback. He was a fine-looking man, cultured, traveled, a thorough sportsman; according to his masculine associates, an all-round good fellow.

As he took his leave, he gave orders that the patient was not to be disturbed on any account, "not even if you have to muzzle the neighbors!" he ended with a sly smile. "She'll probably sleep straight through

the night, so I won't look in again until morning unless you call up. If her friends come for her, make them wait until to-morrow. Tell them it's my orders. I know she's in good hands. Good-by!"

"A woman in a thousand!" he muttered as he turned away. He was not thinking of Miss Mig, nor yet of his interesting "case." Once outside the door he drew in his breath sharply — a way he had when disturbed — and shook his head with an anxious frown, but quickly recovered his customary manner when Marjory joined him, full of sympathetic interest in the mysterious invalid.

"It's a regular romance — just like a novel, isn't it?" she questioned, a thrill of girlish excitement in her voice. "She's a real mystery! I'm wild to find out all about her, poor little thing! I suppose she'll feel like talking as soon as she's rested. She will, won't she? What do you think is the matter with her?"

"Aphas — er —" the doctor coughed deprecatingly and muttered something unintelligible, but Marjory's quick ears had caught his first word, or what there was of it.

"A — what?" she demanded.

"I don't know what it is," he replied gruffly. "We'll be able to tell better later on. Don't bother your head about medical terms, child."

"But you called it something," she persisted. "What do you think it is?"

"Aphasia! Due to a blood-clot, probably. There! You know as much now as you did before!"

"But what is aphasia?"

"It's a strange disease and acts in strange ways. Sometimes people forget their identity or even lose the power of speech for the time being, due to injury to the brain substance. I don't like the looks of that contusion on her head. That's at the root of the trouble. Such things play the very dev — deuce with delicate organizations."

The doctor eyed Marjory furtively to see whether she had noted his slip. Not being a profane man ordinarily, it troubled him. But she was too intent on the subject in hand.

"And she's evidently been through some serious illness recently," he went on, much relieved. "Still it's a bad symptom, very bad!"

"What is?"

"Her not speaking."

"Perhaps she's dumb," Marjory suggested soberly.

"No! She'd talk with her hands if that were the case. And she's not an imbecile —"

"An imbecile! Oh, no! Certainly not! No one could think that!"

"— because she understands what we said to her. I've heard of cases of mislaid identity where the patient was perfectly normal on every other subject. Queer proposition, this brain of ours! Won't stand much fooling, let me tell you! And by the way, if that poor little girl had belonged to the hatless brigade I've seen chasing around St. George this summer, she wouldn't be alive now. It was the hat that saved her."

"And the moral?" Marjory demanded saucily. "Of course there is one."

"You may figure it out for yourself, young lady."

"You think she'll be able to speak soon, don't you?" Marjory reverted anxiously to the original topic. "She'll remember who she is as soon as she recovers from the concussion, won't she?"

"That bump of persistence of yours is unduly enlarged. Here! I'll have to cut it out!" He advanced threateningly towards her, and Marjory backed away with a little shriek. "Well! well! This will never do, never! Here I've been discussing the case with little Marjory just as though she were a grown-up."

"Don't you call almost twenty-three grown-up?" Marjory demanded.

"It's a truly venerable age," he replied with mock solemnity. "We'll be hearing that you are about to renounce single blessedness soon, I fear."

"Indeed you won't!" she contradicted promptly.

"So? Too hard to choose, I suppose! An aggravated case of 'how happy I could be with either, were t'other five or six dear charmers away,' eh? Well, enjoy your untroubled girlhood, Marjory." The bantering tone changed to a serious one. "Womanhood comes soon enough, and brings plenty of cares with it."

When Marjory returned to the den, the stranger was still sleeping peacefully. She tiptoed up to the bed beside which Mrs. Porter was sitting and gazed at the unconscious face.

"Didn't she have a mark of any kind on her clothes?" she whispered to Mrs. Porter.

"I don't know, Marjory. I was so busy helping

the doctor I didn't have time to notice, even if I had thought of it. Look them over, dear, and see. I hate to think of the anxiety her absence must be causing."

"We'll surely hear to-morrow," Marjory answered hopefully, as she began a thorough examination of the garments hastily tossed upon a chair. "Those carrier pigeons will solve the mystery in short order."

"Carrier pigeons?"

"Yes, the W. P. C.'s! They all went home full of the story. Some of them wanted to stay — you could see that — but they didn't dare disobey the doctor. I've always longed to try it myself — he's so bossy; but I've never done it — yet. Here's the maker's name on the shoes and on the coat. Oh, dear, it's one of the big department stores! They sell so many suits the saleslady won't be likely to remember this one. Perhaps she has calling cards or something with an address on it in her bag. Shall I —" she hesitated uncertainly, holding the little leather grip at arm's length.

"Open it, of course, child! We've got to find out who her people are. The clothes seem new, don't they?"

"Yes, brand new, all of them. And these things in the grip are new, too. There isn't a single mark of any kind to help us," she went on in disappointed tones. "Just simple toilet articles and a little traveling case. See? And no cards in the purse."

"Are you sure there's no name anywhere?" Mrs. Porter urged.

"Absolutely sure! I've examined everything

thoroughly. But of course we'll hear from her people soon. Oh!"

"What is it?"

"Suppose they were not expecting her! Wouldn't that be dreadful! If we don't hear by morning, shall I take her coat over and see whether I can find out anything? The collar and cuffs are of this queer novelty goods; perhaps it will help the saleslady to remember."

"If you will, dear." Mrs. Porter's relief was apparent in her voice. "I'm not as young and spry as I was, and I'm beginning to dread the trip to New York. Besides, I don't like to leave her."

"Let me sit up with her to-night, please do," Marjory pleaded. "I'm a splendid nurse — that is, I think I am."

"Don't you have a meeting of the Dramatic Club? I thought I heard Winthrop mention it."

"Oh! the Dramatic Club! Pshaw! That can wait! This is more dramatic to me. I'll be glad to stay and relieve you, may I?"

"It isn't necessary, child. The doctor thinks she'll sleep until morning. I'll have a cot brought in just to be at hand if she needs anything; I don't want her to get frightened again, poor little girl. I'm not going to let anybody see her to-night, not even Aunt Mig. She needs the rest more than they need to have their curiosity satisfied. There goes your supper bell, Marjory! Tell Mrs. Chamberlin she's resting quietly and the doctor hopes she'll be much stronger to-morrow. And thank you for your help, dear: I don't know how I could have managed without it."

As Marjory sped down the stairs and opened the front door, she ran into Winthrop Porter with such force that he had to put his arm around her to steady her.

"The human catapult!" he exclaimed with a laugh, as Marjory blushed and withdrew herself from the supporting arm. "Barnum's latest and best attraction! Are you aware, Miss Chamberlin, that you are trying to knock down the master of this house?"

"Pooh!" she retorted disdainfully. "You may be the master but you're not at all important. There's only one person of importance in this house now, and you don't even know who it is, so there!"

"If you were inside, instead of on the piazza," he flung back, "I'd say it was you, but under the circumstances I'm all at sea. I confess I don't know. Please elucidate, fair lady!"

"Of course you don't; nobody does! She's a *Mystery!* Such a time as we've had! The ladies are all wild with curiosity. I'll warrant your telephone will work overtime to-night! Poor Central! I pity her!"

"What on earth are you talking about, Marjory?" Winthrop spoke with visible impatience. "I can't make any sense out of it. Has the mater got company?"

Marjory attempted to tell him what had happened, but she was too excited to make it clear. Her words tumbled over each other in her eagerness.

"Oh, Win!" she ended breathlessly. "Your

mother's just wild about her; any one can see that. And she's such a pitiful little object. I wish you could take a peep at her."

"But where did she come from? Who is she?" he demanded in bewilderment. "I may be dense, but all I can gather is that some one arrived unexpectedly and was taken ill."

Marjory's voice dropped to a stage whisper. "We haven't the faintest idea who she is, or where she came from. We don't know one thing about her, not one! And she — can't — tell — us!"

"Can't tell you? She must be seriously ill! Too bad!"

"It's not because she's too ill; she can't speak."

"The plot thickens!" he exclaimed teasingly. "A girl who can't talk! Truly a *rara avis!* Probably some servant girl worn out searching for a place."

"A servant girl — worn out — searching!" Marjory repeated in scathing tones. "That shows what you don't know about this suburb, Winthrop Porter, or any other suburb that I ever heard of. Who ever knew of a servant girl searching for work! It's the mistresses that get worn out doing the searching, so there, Mr. Know-It-All!"

"I stand corrected!" he interpolated hastily. "Please don't hit me again; I'll be good!"

"Besides, she isn't a servant and never has been: any one could tell that at a glance. Why, her hands are as white as mine. Whiter, I mean," she corrected herself confusedly, as she caught his quizzical glance at the sun-kissed members in question. "I

forgot; mine are like squaw's paws at this season of the year."

"I like squaw's paws myself, if these are samples," Winthrop assured her daringly. He calmly appropriated the members under discussion, as he reminded her earnestly: "You know the Dramatic Club meets to-night, Marjory."

"I know it does! I'd forgotten all about it until your mother spoke of it."

"Do you think you can tear yourself away from the fascinating, lily-handed mystery long enough to honor me with your company this evening?" he demanded. In spite of the lightness of his tone he awaited her answer with ill-concealed uneasiness.

"Certainly!" she acquiesced, with a flattering promptness from which her next words detracted sadly. "I might as well go; your mother won't let me stay with her. She don't intend to let any one disturb her to-night, not even her relatives. She wants her to sleep."

"Then with 'her' permission I'll call for you at seven-thirty, may I?"

"Of course: don't you always? There's Marjy ringing the supper bell from the side window for my especial benefit, so I've got to rush. S. Y. L., Win!"

The young man smiled at the familiar leave-taking, which in plain English meant: "See you later!" His smile broadened into a hearty laugh as Marjory, thinking he had gone on into the house, scrambled over the fence with the agility of a boy, to the detriment of the filmy frock and the snowy

slippers. Then she dashed up the path gesticulating wildly, and uttering a warning "Sh! sh!" to her niece and namesake.

"Stop it, Marjy! I'm not deaf! That's enough to rouse the dead. You'll wake Miss Mystery!"

CHAPTER II

"WHAT FOOLS THESE MORTALS BE!"

"Ah, Love! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits — and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's desire!"

Like all girls the world over, Marjory Chamberlin sometimes dreamed of the greatest event in girlhood's calendar — her first proposal. In these pleasing visions the hero was apt to change his outward form according to the latest "thriller," or the season's successful play, but his object was always the same; to secure the priceless boon of her love. At times he was of the slender, dark, handsome type, with ravishing mustache and soulful black eyes, who knelt at her feet in abject conviction of his lady-love's angelic attributes and his own unworthiness. Again he was athletic, masterful, broad-shouldered, clean-cut, smooth-shaven, a muscular giant who towered above her, strong and dominant, demanding, by the very stress of his passion, the right to possess her, body and soul.

Marjory had never quite decided, in her own mind, which type she would prefer when the psychological moment arrived. She liked to picture herself offering gracious encouragement to the prostrate, self-

depreciatory one, even though she realized dimly that there might be insuperable objections to soulful heights as a place of permanent residence. One could rise to them upon the great occasion itself, but could one remain aloft in such a rarefied atmosphere? To a practical girl like Marjory the nectar and ambrosia of the gods had its drawbacks as a steady diet. On the other hand, the dictatorial type also presented difficulties. She might enjoy reading of heroines who scarcely dared call their souls their own, but she found it difficult to picture herself, "Marjory Tinder-Box" as her brother called her, in that submissive rôle.

In fact it was hard to conceive of Love in any guise, either soulful or masterful, transforming her into a meek Griselda or a conquered Kate. She had opinions upon all subjects, opinions which she expressed freely, and she was unable to visualize herself minus either opinions or their expression. In spite of girlish dreams she was a practical little lady.

"Game clear through!" her brother described her with admiring frankness; "but with more than one girl's share of temper, and stubborn as a mule when she wants to be. Fortunately she don't often want to!"

Marjory had money of her own, but she had lived with this only brother and his wife ever since her mother and father died, ten years before, and in spite of her tinder-box tendencies was fairly idolized by the whole family, especially by her niece and namesake, Marjy, a girl of fourteen. She was too

active by nature to find much time for dreaming, even on such a fascinating topic as the lover whom Fate held in store for her, but that he would come some day she never doubted. What healthy, happy girl of twenty-two ever wastes time over such a foregone conclusion, especially if, like Marjory, she is the most popular girl in her own gay set?

Yet in spite of these occasional girlish dreams, lovers, either sighing or commanding, were farthest from her thoughts that night as she and Winthrop said good-by to the other members of the Dramatic Club, and strolled slowly homewards. She had known him all her life; they had been companions ever since her boarding-school days. It was the "off agin, on again!" style of friendship, it is true: many a row royal waged between them, sometimes over such trivial differences that by the time the peace pact was concluded neither combatant could recall the cause of the war. Both were hot-headed and impulsive, but their quarrels were always patched up after varying periods of hostility.

The moonlight was flooding the world with its pale golden glory as they strolled slowly along the wide, tree-shadowed avenue, but they were too busily engaged in a brisk argument over the merits and demerits of the different plays under consideration for the Dramatic Club's repertory for the coming season, to note its beauty. Both were active members of the club and both knew how to act — a combination that does not always exist in amateur organizations.

"I wish we could have chosen the 'Prisoner of

Zenda'!" Marjory exclaimed regretfully. "I'm wild to play it. Such a chance for artistic costumes!"

"I know that, but it's too difficult for a club like ours," Winthrop objected sensibly. "We'd better stick to the lighter comedies; we'd make hash of a heavy play like that."

"You might," Marjory retorted in biting tones. As "leading lady" she had set her heart on a more ambitious rôle for the coming season, and found it hard to give up the coveted play even in the face of reasonable objections. "I'm sure I could play my part in it, and I know one man in the club who would be just perfect as Rudolf Rassendyl."

"You mean Courtland?" Winthrop demanded sharply.

"Yep!" The reply was provokingly frank. "He's going to be a real addition to the club, I think. 'Arthur' is a favorite name of mine," she went on sweetly. "Isn't he handsome? I've always admired that type of man."

"I understand now why you fought so persistently for the 'Prisoner of Zenda'!" he commented in sarcastic tones; "but I can't say I see anything in a man like that to go into raptures over."

Considering that the "man like that" was his best friend, and that he himself had persuaded him to move to St. George, proposing him in glowing terms for membership in the Dramatic Club, the angry amazement in Marjory's face as she turned upon him was not strange.

"I think he's a splendid actor," she remarked with

scathing emphasis; "and I like him personally, too, ever so much."

"So the whole club perceived," was the curt rejoinder.

"What did they perceive?" She stopped abruptly as she made her angry demand, emphasized by an unmistakable stamp of the white-shod foot. "I haven't the faintest idea what you are driving at, Win."

"Oh! yes you have!" he contradicted coolly. "You certainly made it plain enough. Why, you all but fell on his neck in that scene you tried over: too bad the club isn't blind!"

"Kindly understand, once and for all, Mr. Porter," Marjory replied with chilling distinctness, "that I am not in the habit of falling on any man's neck."

"And you understand, once and for all, Miss Chamberlin," he retorted hotly, completely carried away by his jealousy, "that we're going to cut out the Dramatic Club after we're married."

For once Marjory was speechless. She stood stock still and stared at him, her lips apart, her expression one of genuine bewilderment.

"Wha — what do you mean?" she finally stammered, almost inaudibly.

"I mean just what I say," he repeated firmly, so completely under the sway of the grievance he had been nursing all evening that he never even perceived her surprise. "It's all very well for a lot of unmarried people to go into raptures over each other in a play, but a man don't want to see his wife doing

it, if it's over some other fellow! At least I don't, I know."

"But Winthrop, we — we aren't — we haven't —"

"Haven't what?"

"Why, you never even — I didn't —" she broke off, unable to voice her shocked surprise.

For the first time he realized that his impulsive avowal had taken her unawares.

"Now look here, Marjory!" he demanded in a tone of injured incredulity; "do you mean to tell me that you haven't understood how I feel towards you after all these years? Who escorts you to everything that goes on, I'd like to know?"

"But that's because we're next-door neighbors," she objected weakly.

"Next door fiddle-sticks!" He snapped his fingers contemptuously, then added in a voice in which triumph was unblushingly apparent: "We'll be nearer neighbors in a month or two, if I have anything to say about it! Oh! Marjory, darling! Surely you know how I love you! You must know it! Why, every thought, every word, every act of mine is for you. Life wouldn't be worth living if I thought that I was not to spend it with you. I suppose I ought to have told you before, but I thought you understood, so I waited to be sure —"

"Sure?" she repeated, an unconscious quiver of dread in her voice.

"That I could take care of you in the proper way, darling; not sure of my love; that's been absolutely certain ever since I've known you. And I am sure

now. I'm one of the firm; it was settled today!"

"Oh, Win! no! Isn't that splendid!"

"I could hardly wait to tell you, but you were so full of that sick woman you wouldn't give me a chance. I'm making enough now to go to housekeeping right off the reel, if —"

He stopped to give her a chance to express herself, but she did not take advantage of it. This unusual silence seemed ominous; it routed his triumphant security as no words could have done.

"Is it to be 'no,' Marjory?" In spite of valiant efforts, he failed to control his trembling voice. "Have I been — mistaken? It seemed so — so settled between us. I — I thought it was all right. Everybody else thinks so, too. Mother does, I know, and your brother and sister. Oh, Marjory! I don't see how I can bear it if —"

A catch in his breath that sounded suspiciously like a sob, completed the sentence.

"Winthrop!" Marjory's voice was a mere whisper. "When did you begin to — to feel this way?"

"I never began. I've always cared!" he asserted fiercely. "And I always will. I'm not up on high-brow love-making, Marjory, but God knows I'm in earnest."

No hero of those girlish dreams of hers — dreams that now lay hopelessly shattered by the unromantic manner of his avowal — could have laid his bare and quivering heart before her more convincingly than this. In a flash of omniscience she realized that though neither soulful nor masterful, suppliant nor

commanding, it was Winthrop she loved, Winthrop she always had loved, Winthrop she always would love as long as she lived.

"I — I see you don't — Oh! darling, can't you?" he pleaded.

Without a word she turned a glowing face towards him. Love's message was written large in the sparkling eyes, the eager, parted lips, the flushing and paling of the rounded cheek.

"Marjory! You do love me! Say it, darling! Say you do, sweetheart! No, never mind! I don't need the words now."

He crushed her to him in a passion that almost terrified her. Winthrop, the familiar friend, was completely lost in this possessive man-creature who looked searchingly into her eyes, then kissed her lips, her throat, her hair, in an outburst of relief and longing. Enough now of soulfulness in his glowing eyes! Enough of masterfulness in his enfolding arms! She felt almost terrified as she rested her head against his heart and heard its mad throbbing, but the feeling soon gave way to one of supreme content with life and love, especially with love!

If the huge elm under whose friendly shade they had paused, had not been discreet, what a tale of youthful passion and life-long devotion it might have divulged to an unsympathetic public! For though Winthrop's proposal began in prosaic fashion, it ended poetically enough to suit any ideal. But the elm kept its own counsel, and after the first stress of exuberance was over, the pair walked slowly homeward, so uplifted that they seemed to be treading on

air. Others had loved; others would love: but their love was different — it always is!

"And you never even suspected how I felt towards you?" Winthrop demanded for the third time, simply for the pleasure of hearing her answer.

"Not once," she replied, snuggling closer to his arm.

"It doesn't seem possible, when my every heart-beat was saying 'Marjory! Marjory! Marjory!'"

"But I must have known it deep down in my soul, don't you think so?" she queried prettily.

It was all eminently satisfactory, even though her knight had not come riding his gayly caparisoned steed through the dusky forest glades to fling himself at her feet. The tree-shaded avenue answered every purpose, and in her eyes Winthrop was now the knight of knights.

"I wish, for your sake, sweetheart, that I was one of those fellows the novelists rave over — the kind you girls seem to long for," he explained, with evident regret in his manly voice; "but I'm just a plain business man —"

"I don't consider you very plain," Marjory interrupted with a mischievous smile. "And I wouldn't like to marry a 'beauty' man; it would keep one busy shooing the other girls away."

He kissed her again as a punishment for her impertinent sally.

"I couldn't live up to that style of thing even if I were fool enough to try it," he went on. "High-flown love-making isn't in my line, Marjory."

"What is in your line?" she demanded saucily,

peeping up at his face from under downcast lids, the deep dimple in her chin looking more bewitching than ever.

"This! — and this! — and this!" he responded, taking a prompt advantage that even her embarrassed "Oh, Win!" failed to check. "And a single-hearted devotion, Marjory," he added soberly. "Not the 'kneel and tear your hair' variety, perhaps, but the kind that will try to guard you against trouble, and make your life a happy one. You believe that, dearest?"

Another spreading elm stood ready to perform its friendly office, but the avenue was deserted, and the lovers, emboldened, did not even seek its shelter.

"Let's keep the engagement a secret, just for a little while, shall we?" Marjory coaxed, as she emerged from his embrace, ruffled but ecstatic.

"Why?" he demurred, anxious to tell his joy to the whole world.

"Oh, we don't want everybody to know about it and be watching everything we do. And we'll try not to be foolish like other engaged couples. We've quar — differed so often that we ought to be through by this time. Of course we will be, now that we're actually engaged. But such insignificant misunderstandings can wreck a whole life's happiness, sometimes! If people would only plan their lives beforehand, sensibly and thoughtfully, it could all be avoided." She spoke with a wordly-wise shake of her head, as one who has delved deep into the subject.

"Of course," Winthrop agreed heartily. At that

moment he would have acquiesced just as heartily in any sentiment of hers.

"Let's begin exactly as we mean to go on, Win," Marjory pleaded earnestly. "Thoughtful consideration for each other and perfect trust in one another; that's my plan in a nutshell! Then there will be no room for misunderstandings, see?"

He saw, but somehow the insight made him revert to his original grievance.

"That's all right, dearest, but see here, I don't care about your acting with Ar — with any man — as though you belonged to him, even in a play, I mean. You're mine, now, all mine, and I'll let him know it in short order."

"Sh! You silly boy!" She tapped his face with a reproving finger, not at all disturbed by his jealousy. "Of course it's your great love that makes you say such things, but it's unnecessary in our case, Winthrop. Nothing on earth could make me doubt you, and there's no girl I know in all our set, not one, that I wouldn't trust you with. Perfect love — perfect trust! That's to be my motto."

"Suppose it's not a girl in our set?" he questioned teasingly; but for once Marjory failed to rise to the bait so temptingly dangled before her. Her trust seemed sufficient to cover any contingency: it was the strength of the untried.

Thus satisfactorily settling in one short half-hour all the vexed questions that beset the path of ordinary mortals when they give hostages to Fortune by becoming engaged, they proceeded to outline a future of such unearthly peace and prosperity that it alone

was enough to tempt adverse fate to interfere. The little god of love, poising another arrow for another pair of victims, must have chuckled into his quiver, but they were too engrossed to hear him.

Blushing rosily after the parting, so different from the customary, careless good night, Marjory slipped up to her room, her heart singing a pæan of praise for her promised happiness. It was as dainty a sanctum as pale yellow and white hangings, white reed furniture, good pictures and many flowers could make it. The broad window-seat was covered with pillows bearing various college insignia; desk and tables were littered with favors and votive offerings; while the mantel and the dressing-table mirror were filled with men's photographs that had gazed approvingly upon her ever since their owners presented them. With the smile still lingering on her lips and a glow of girlish triumph in her heart, she whirled up to the mantel, and with one ruthless sweep denuded it of its pictures. A ribbon-decked scrap-basket stood beneath the business-like little desk. Into this they tumbled, helter-skelter, followed shortly by those from the mirror, while she hummed in light paraphrase: "There's only one man in the world for me!" At last her knight had come! Though his armor were not in evidence, though he discoursed ordinarily in the blunt phraseology of an up-to-date young business man instead of the courtly strains of chivalry, his message was the same: her heart acknowledged its compelling power!

"And to think that I've been loving him all this time without knowing it!" she exclaimed aloud, in

wondering ecstasy. "Well, I know it now, and I'll never forget it!"

Then she set to work at the tiny desk. Letter after letter was haled from its cubby-hole, given a cursory glance, then with a gesture of indifference or disdain tossed into the scrap-basket, there to hob-nob with the counterfeit presentment of its writer. The tiny clock, set in its crystal ball, struck one before this heart house-cleaning was finished. She viewed the empty cubby-holes with gleeful satisfaction.

"Win'll fill them. Oh, dear! I wish we didn't live so close to each other! I love letters so! I can hardly wait for the first one!"

Instead of the dreams that ought to have attended her that night — passionate poems of love and life, or peaceful idyls of domestic bliss — she was tormented by a veritable avalanche of mystery that threatened to engulf her; a devastating storm that seemed to burst from a clear sky. Just what danger the strange warning portended she was unable to ascertain, but so vivid was the horrible dream that she lay wide-awake after it, unable to shake off the disturbing impression it had made upon her mind. Finally, with an impatient exclamation which flouted the whole tribe of uncanny dreams and portents, she gave up the attempt to sleep. Though it was still early, she dressed with nervous haste and went down to work off her uneasiness in the garden, one plot of which was her especial pride. When Tekla, her sister-in-law's Swedish maid, appeared, her stolidity was visibly ruffled at the sight before her: Miss Marjory, who usually cuddled under her covers until

the last minute, was vigorously digging away at her chrysanthemums while the clock was striking six!

The bright sunshine and the crisp autumn breeze cleared away the night's disturbing visions as rapidly as they dissipated the light mist that had rolled in from the lower bay during the darkness. By breakfast time Marjory was ready to laugh at her previous uneasiness.

"Perfect love — perfect trust!" she murmured softly, as she worked away energetically among her plants. "And Win's worthy of both. There isn't a man in the world like him! As if I could ever doubt him!"

At that very moment the object of Marjory's encomiums was trying to convince himself that he did not hear his alarm clock's warning whirr, but without success, for the insistent little timepiece, dull and battered though it was from four years of strenuous undergraduate life, knew its business thoroughly. It was well aware that in the catalogue of its owner's virtues one might search in vain for the love of early rising. More than once in its zeal, it had hopped off the table and danced an energetic jig on the floor beneath; and had been apostrophized with unprintable fervency for its persistence.

Winthrop had graduated from Columbia several years earlier, and had been fortunate enough — deserving enough, according to his mother's version — to be taken into the office of a well-known firm of contracting engineers with the promise of a partnership in the near future if he made good! Such unusual success at the very beginning of his career

would have dazzled many a man, but Winthrop was too much in earnest, too busy "making good," to find time to be dazzled. Besides, he had his gaze fixed too intently upon the upper rungs of the ladder to be deflected by any happenings, however dazzling, at its base. And for some time now, Marjory herself had been perched upon the topmost rung, attracting him not only by her girlish beauty and the charm of her very elusiveness, but by the setting in which men like to picture the women they love — a cozy home, a fireside, and children. The promised partnership had become an actual fact on the very day of his proposal, and the following morning would see his name, *Winthrop Van Name Porter,* in imposing black letters on one of the ground-glass doors leading to the firm's offices in lower Broadway. Only the fear that the sign painter might have been dilatory kept him from urging Marjory to come over to the office that very day to see the wonderful sight for herself. Was it not the mental picture of those magic letters and all they represented that had given him the right to say what he had said to her the night before?

He longed to have the whole family see them, too, especially Chester. According to this enthusiastic younger brother of his, he was destined "to make the back numbers sit up and take notice before he got through with them!" Winthrop knew where he stood in the boy's regard and all unconsciously tried to live up to the lad's high ideal of him. As for Aunt Mig, ordinarily unemotional even to hardness, she had always worshiped unabashed before her older

nephew's shrine. In her eyes this new honor was simply an obvious tribute to sterling worth.

Winthrop had been the head of the house, virtually, ever since his father's death while he was still in High School. Possibly this responsibility and the fact that his mother was what she was — a strong, sensible comrade and guide who believed in him even though she had none of his aunt's abject worship — had kept him from succumbing to the insidious temptations that beset the path of good-looking, well-dressed young men doing business in the great metropolis. To whatever influence it was due, he had marched straight, and while far from being a candidate either for wings or a halo, he had kept his manhood pure and unspotted, fit to offer even to a girl like Marjory Chamberlin. He realized this with a glow of thankfulness.

Though it seemed to him now that he had always loved her, in reality he had begun to discover, only a few months before this story opens, the lovable nature that lay back of the porcupine quills in Marjory's armor. Up to that time she had been simply a "rattling good sort of a girl," ready for sport of any kind, and an adept in most forms of it. But even after he realized the true state of his feelings, he had had no idea of an actual engagement for some time to come until his unexpected promotion, following a period of surprisingly beatific behavior on the prickly Miss Marjory's part, proved too much for his prudent resolves. And now he found himself a budding Benedict, anxious to blossom into full flower at the earliest possible moment. He knew that he could

be spared, as his mother owned the home in which they lived and had the rental from a block of small stores in St. George's "Broadway." This, with what Aunt Mig contributed towards the family exchequer from her salary as a teacher made her practically independent. There was never an imposing balance in her bank book, but she was a careful manager.

Aunt Mig, Mr. Porter's only sister, had lived with the Porters ever since the boys could remember, and had taught in the High School for more years than she cared to enumerate. She was a maiden lady of the so-called "uncertain age," though why uncertain when to its possessor it always seems hopelessly settled, is one of the mysteries of our language. She was tall and commanding, a handsome woman still, in her own severe style. She could be gracious in her manners, too — but she seldom was! It was this uncompromising severity that kept people at arm's length even though they acknowledged her intellectual superiority. As Mrs. Porter had said to the doctor, Aunt Mig's real nature was the pure gold of unselfishness, but it was pretty heavily alloyed with the brass of a dictatorial bluntness. Unlike the usual arrangement, the gold was on the inside, unfortunately.

Last, but not least on the Porter family roll, came Chester, best described as "just boy!" He was at the height of the tall, lanky period which Marjory graphically described as "too old to spank and too young to kiss!" At this period of his life Chester's personal preferences would undoubtedly have chosen

the first alternative as the lesser of two evils. He was a sturdy chap, inordinately fond of outdoor sports yet not a dullard — simply one of those active lads whose school hours "break into the day dreadfully!"

Like most boys of his age he was sensitive, stubborn, shy, with good impulses, as a rule, though lacking the moral backbone to carry them out. What people would "say" was a bugbear to him. Slang was the very breath of his nostrils. Shorn of that, his vocabulary was meager indeed. When Aunt Mig once commanded him to refrain altogether from its use, on penalty of forfeiting the weekly allowance she made him, Winthrop took pity on the poor boy's enforced silence and begged him off. But then Winthrop could always twist Aunt Mig about his little finger. He was the cultivated flower of the Porter plot, while the "Kid," as the family called Chester, was the common or garden variety — in his aunt's estimation the veriest weed! He was perennially pestered by his elders, or so it seemed to the youthful victim of their well-meant advice, exhortation and denunciation. The placard on the door of his den was full of grim meaning to him. Chester's constant companion was his dog "Bugs," so named in spite of the protests, individual and *en masse,* of the entire Porter family, or possibly because of them. He was an attractive little fellow, a stray, whom good fortune had directed to the Porter place in his puppyhood. He had a shaggy brown coat, a speaking tail, and even more eloquent brown eyes. The delver into dogology was informed that his breed was a mystery

still unsolved. The shaggy coat indicated Hibernian extraction, but this was contradicted by the stumpy fox-terrier tail and the Airedale length of legs, while the contour of the head suggested a faint suspicion of pug. But whatever his breed, Bugs was a member of the family in good standing and between him and his young master existed the mutual love and understanding so often found between boy and dog. Strange to say, both of them avoided Aunt Mig if they saw her first.

Unlike Marjory, Winthrop's dreams, the night after his proposal, had been so soothing that he deliberately disregarded the noisy efforts of his alarm clock and was late in consequence; but then, a man doesn't become engaged every day! He ate a hasty breakfast but snatched a few minutes afterwards to whisper his secret into his mother's ear. She had always been his confidante; he felt that he could not withhold from her the greatest event in his life. Then he dashed out to the avenue on the first lap of his daily sprint to the ferry, but paused again, late though he was, to give greeting to Marjory, who had evidently been waiting to see him pass. He lifted his hat with a deferential gesture totally unlike the airy flourish with which he would have rushed past her a few days earlier. Then, much as he admired her, she was simply "one of the girls," but last night had changed all that; now she was the only woman in the world for him, his future wife, even perhaps — He blushed boyishly under his tan and forebore to finish the ecstatic thought.

CHAPTER III

AN OPENING FOR SHERLOCK HOLMES

"And He that toss'd you down into the Field
He knows about it all — He knows — HE knows!"

The St. George ferry schedule was divided into three sections by the "know-it-alls," those old-timers who pride themselves upon being authority on matters suburban. The boats up to eight o'clock were patronized by the workers; those from eight to eight-thirty by the clerkers; and after that, the shirkers! Although, strictly speaking, Winthrop Porter was not a clerker, he usually made the eight-thirty boat. Of late, since Arthur Courtland had become a St. Georgian, he and his friend invariably sought the same spot in the men's cabin, and read their papers or smoked and chatted sociably on the way over to New York.

Marjory had been hovering restlessly about the front windows, that morning, eager for a glimpse of Winthrop. She scarcely waited to finish her breakfast, so fearful was she of missing him. But as the minutes flew by without bringing him, she experienced a sense of disappointment out of all proportion to its cause. Just as she was turning away, hopeless, he dashed down the walk, and her sun

once more shone brilliantly as she smilingly returned his deferential greeting, then began her preparations for the trip to town, her heart throbbing with a jubilate of love and happiness.

"If no one's claimed Miss Mystery yet," she explained to her sister-in-law, "I've offered to go over to the store where she bought her suit, to see whether I can find out anything about her. But her relatives probably telephoned or came for her last night. If Win hadn't been so late I'd have asked him, but I'm afraid he'll miss his boat as it is, and he ought not be late now that he's one of the firm."

Mrs. Chamberlin noted the tone of proprietary solicitude and glanced at her with dawning suspicion on her plump, fair face. The contented little smile on the girl's lips, and the far-away look in the dark eyes were all the confirmation she needed, but being a kindly woman she heroically refrained from trying to force her confidence. She was still young enough to remember her own experiences at the beginning of lovers' lane!

"I'd rather you had that errand than I!" she replied, with a short laugh. "It's a regular melodrama, one of the Sherlock Holmes variety; the clerks will think you're crazy."

"Who cares for the clerks! Let them laugh if they want to! You see her people might not have been expecting her, or she may be just moving over here, or something like that. Anyhow, we've got to do all we can to find out who she is. Suppose you had lost your memory and wandered away, Lil," Marjory put the case reproachfully, "wouldn't you

be glad to have people help you, even if it did seem melodramatic?"

"Sorry, honey, but I can't even suppose such a case!" And Marjory, looking at the stout, placid, young matron before her, smiled involuntarily; her imagination was also unequal to the task.

"Surely the salesgirls will be glad to give any information in their power," she went on, reverting to the subject uppermost in her mind, "especially when I tell them about it. Still, I don't see how they could know much, either!"

"They'll know enough to direct you to the lunatic asylum," Mrs. Chamberlin declared bluntly. "No!" as Marjory's lips opened in heated protest, "I'm not saying it in a Thorne-ish way at all, so don't fly up, dear! I'm just as sympathetic as you are. But look at it from a common-sense standpoint, child! She doesn't know who she is and she couldn't tell us if she did know! Her clothes are all new, with nothing individual about them, even the underwear; that's unusual enough, to my mind. And no cards, or identification marks of any kind in her traveling bag, either. Even her toilet articles have never been used. It's plain enough, I think. She's just walked out of some sanatorium or asylum! She's evidently had money enough to buy the things she needed immediately."

"But she's such a delicate little thing, Lil. Any one can see that she's a gentlewoman."

"Even gentlewomen are sometimes imbeciles. If I were you, Marjory, I'd telephone to all the private hospitals around New York. You mark my words,

that's where you'll get the information you want about your 'Miss Mystery,' as you call her. This is practical advise, so I suppose it won't appeal to you, because you've set your heart on a romantic solution of the affair. I wonder if you'd feel the same if she were old and ugly! Human nature, probably! Well, I wish you luck! Tell Mother Porter I'll be glad to help her in any way, if she needs me. All she has to do is to call me up. Good-by!"

As Marjory neared the Porter's door, a blush struggled with the sunburn on the young face; her footsteps lagged in unaccustomed embarrassment. Winthrop's words of the previous evening had changed everything. Mrs. Porter of to-day was his mother; a very different person from the old friend and neighbor of yesterday. Helping her in this intimate way seemed almost like a public announcement of the precious secret. Still blushing, she slipped in at the side door and started up the stairs, but a gentle voice arrested her.

"Daughter!"

The girl turned at the soft exclamation, and with a little cry of joy ran straight into the outstretched arms.

"You know? He — Win — told you?" she murmured confusedly.

"Yes, dear. He's a good boy, Marjory. He's never had a secret from his mother."

"And you — you —" Her wistful tone finished the sentence.

"Why, child, I'm delighted. Surely you know that."

"You must have been awfully surprised," Marjory commented, fingering the brooch on the motherly bosom nervously.

Mrs. Porter's hearty laugh pealed forth irresistibly.

"Surprised? Not a bit! You were like two young ostriches. But a mother's eyes are keen where her dear ones are concerned, Marjory. You'll understand some day, please God. My boys are the best sons in the world, but I've always longed for a daughter, and surely no mother could ask more than I'll get in my little brown neighbor-lassie. There, there, dearie!" raising the blushing face to hers and kissing the tremulous lips tenderly, "make the most of this engagement time. It's the real honey-moon, after all: we settle into our life ruts so soon after marriage. Yours and Win's will never lack for variety, though; you are both pretty peppery. But you'll have to learn to adjust yourselves. I almost said 'yourself,' Marjory: we women do the lion's share when it comes to adjusting."

She stifled a sigh that seemed out of place coming from her, and patting the girl's hands lovingly turned towards the dining-room, calling over her shoulder: "I must hurry back to that poor child upstairs, but I don't get a dear daughter every day. This is my first experience, so I surely ought to be allowed some latitude. Wait a moment, Marjory, and I'll go up with you."

"Are her people here? Has she spoken yet?" Marjory inquired breathlessly. "What's her name? Where was she going?"

Mrs. Porter shook her head as she disappeared into the dining-room.

She re-appeared a moment later, bearing a large tray on which was arranged an appetizing breakfast — coffee, muffins and home-made jelly, crisp bacon and poached eggs. Marjory sniffed appreciatively as she relieved her of her burden.

"This looks so good it almost makes me forget I've had my breakfast. What is it Win calls this tray? Oh! I remember — the 'Incentive!'"

Win's mother laughed.

"Yes. He vows it's putting a premium on staying in bed."

They found the stranger lying back among her pillows, her blue eyes fixed listlessly upon the swaying tops of the tall trees on the avenue. She brightened up as they entered, and tried to do justice to the dainty breakfast, but in spite of a visible effort she ate almost nothing. After she had finished, she laid one thin, white hand with caressing touch upon Mrs. Porter's, and drawing the gentle face down close to her own, kissed her gratefully. There were tears in Mrs. Porter's eyes as she turned away.

"Here is the coat, Marjory," she said hurriedly, to hide her emotion. "Shall I wrap it for you? It will make a pretty big bundle, I'm afraid."

"No, thank you. I'll carry it over my arm. I hate packages."

With a smile and a wave of good-by for Miss Mystery, Marjory started out. On the landing she came face to face with the doctor.

"Any one claimed the invalid yet?" he demanded

gruffly. There was a note of anxiety in his voice that did not escape Marjory's quick ear.

"No! Not a soul! Will you —"

But the doctor had gone. When he left the room, fifteen minutes later, he found her still waiting for him. She could not bear to start on her errand until she had heard his verdict.

"Is she better?" she asked eagerly.

"She is."

"But really, I mean," she persisted.

"Really and truly, blackly and bluely," he quoted in teasing tones. "Didn't I say she was?"

"When will she talk?"

"Ask me something easy, Marjory."

"Oh, dear! You doctors just cover yourselves with armor-plate. It's like getting blood out of a turnip to find out anything."

"Then why try?" he responded imperturbably. "Little girls should learn to curb their curiosity."

"Little girls!" Marjory's voice was full of disdain. "Do you call an engaged young lady a little girl? Oh! I forgot! We didn't intend to tell it for ever so long."

The doctor's eyes twinkled.

"So you and Win have actually stopped arguing long enough to become engaged! Well! well! well! I suppose you each feared the other might marry and you'd have no one to wrangle with. What a brave boy Win is!"

Instead of the expected flash of fire from the dark eyes the doctor saw them fill with tears, while her lips trembled piteously. He took both her hands in

one of his and patted them gently, as he hastened to add: "Joking aside, Marjory, I congratulate you both from the bottom of my heart. It's a big step to take, child; I hope you realize its importance. Are you sure of yourself and of Winthrop?"

"Of course I am, doctor," she averred stoutly. "What a funny question! I couldn't love any body else if I tried. I know I — Win quarrels with me sometimes," she amended deliberately, as she caught the doctor's aggravating little chuckle, "but we're absolutely sure of each other, now and forever more."

"Amen!" the doctor murmured fervently, kissing the glowing face with fatherly tenderness. "I've kept my eye on you, Marjory. I know your brother and his wife are good to you, but this is the time a girl needs her mother's advice and help. I wish you had her now, child."

Marjory looked up through tear-blurred eyes, but a smile shone through the mist as she reminded him in low tones: "I'll have Mother Porter by and by."

"And she's a mother worth having!" he agreed heartily. "Well, good-by. Don't disturb our little invalid with questions. Queer some one hasn't appeared by this time, isn't it? Tell Mrs. Porter I'll drop in again later."

"She may be all right by that time," Marjory prophesied brightly.

"She may — but I doubt it!" The end of the sentence was uttered under the doctor's breath as the front door shut after him.

Marjory's trip to town was almost barren of re-

sults. She sought the shoe-dealer first, as he was close to the Elevated station, but could glean nothing from the salesmen.

"You see, Miss, we wait on one or two customers a day," one of them informed her with brisk sarcasm; "and we can't be expected to remember who buys each pair of shoes."

"You couldn't be expected to remember anything!" was on the tip of Marjory's tongue, but she refrained from expressing herself, urging instead, in pleading tones: "But so much depends upon it in this case, I thought you might be able to recall something about her. You see we must find out who she is."

"Sorry I can't help you," he replied. There was a brusque finality in his manner which told her that any further attempt would be a waste of time. She turned to leave the store, but found her way blocked by a sextette of smiling, chattering girls, evidently a bride-elect and her attendants to judge by their conversation whose one topic was "the wedding!" Marjory blushed involuntarily as she watched the lively scene and realized that she herself would soon be acting the leading part in a similar one. The thought sent a thrill through her whole being.

It was while she waited for the group to part and let her pass that she overheard the salesman whom she had been interviewing remark in wearied tones to a fellow-salesman: "Thinks this is a detective bureau or a police station, evidently! Oh! these women! these women! They expect us to demand each lady's name, age and address! If I had to re-

member every customer I sell a pair of shoes to, I'd jump off the Battery!"

The delicate flush that the pretty sight before her had brought to her cheeks deepened to an angry red. Considering the righteous wrath that fairly seethed within her, she made as dignified an exit as possible. For an instant she was tempted to report the salesman for insolence, but her good sense asserted itself before she reached the desk. She realized that her quest must seem a foolish one to the uninterested, and hesitated at the door, almost determined to go no further in the matter. But suddenly her eye fell upon the coat over her arm; its vari-colored adornment renewed her courage.

"The collar and cuffs are different from any I've ever seen. Surely they haven't a whole department full of that particular pattern. Whoever sold the suit may happen to remember."

With hope once more springing eternal, she reached the great store and sought the floor-walker in the Ladies' Suit Department. He politely summoned one of the salesladies, a haughty blond creature arrayed in a sweeping black gown fit for a reception, and turned the case over to her. She was all attention as long as there seemed to be the prospect of a sale, but after that her attention disappeared, and without even a glance at the coat Marjory held up for inspection she briefly disclaimed all knowledge of the sale. There was even greater finality about her than about the wearied shoe-salesman, and Marjory was turning away sick at heart, when one of the other girls intercepted her.

"I sold that suit, Miss," she remarked quietly. "I remember because I wanted it myself. Can I help you in any way? Come over here where we won't be disturbed."

She led the way into one of the tiny fitting-rooms and drew the portière before the entrance. Then she listened attentively while Marjory poured forth the whole story.

"If you can only remember who bought this suit," she ended, in pleading earnestness.

"I do. You know I told you I wanted it myself, that's why I remember. And the customer had such a sweet face, too."

"Goody! I'm so glad I came," Marjory exclaimed joyfully. "Please see if you can find out where it was sent."

"She took it with her."

The girl's words were like a dash of cold water.

"Oh, no! Surely not! Such a little thing carry a big suit box?"

"Little thing!" The girl stared at her in amazement. "Why, she was perfectly immense! But she had the kindest smile. She told me—"

"Yes! Go on!" Marjory urged excitedly. It was a moment of breathless import for the self-appointed detective.

"That it was for a young girl who had met with an accident and was unable to come herself."

"Oh! if she had only had it sent!"

"But she didn't! She said it was needed for immediate use. She had her arms full of bundles, but when I asked whether she wanted it put up in a pack-

age or a box she just laughed and said: 'I don't care which. I have a taxi waiting at the door. Besides I've passed the finicky stage long ago, child. Just hurry it up — that's all I want. My steamer sails at two, and I'd like to be on it, if it's all the same to you.'"

"Did she say where it sailed to?" Marjory asked in depressed tones. Such stumbling blocks as steamers sailing for unknown ports had not entered into her calculations: they offered peculiar complications.

"No, ma'am! She just bowed and smiled when I handed the box to her, and thanked me for helping her choose the suit. I'm awful sorry I don't know more, but I can't give you the address when there wasn't any to give, more's the pity. I only wish I could help you. It's just like a novel, isn't it? Perhaps she's an heiress running away from her lover. I'll be simply dying to hear how it ends."

"At this rate I'm afraid it won't end at all." Marjory's manner betrayed deep dejection. "It's a serial story, evidently, and I haven't reached the 'to-be-concluded' number! But you have helped me ever so much. If — I mean when we learn anything more, I'll let you know."

"I hope I won't have to wait long for the last installment," the girl replied whimsically. "Leave me your address, and if my nice fat lady ever comes in again I'll let you know. She might only have been sailing for Old Point, or Portland. Lots of people talk about a little coast trip as though they were going across the ocean. It makes us laugh sometimes; they put on so about it! Still, she wasn't the

'put on' kind, either, when you come to think of it; she was just jolly and nice."

Mrs. Porter listened with keen interest to the story of Marjory's day.

"You did all you possibly could, dear," she remarked consolingly. "Winthrop will know what further steps to take. He overslept this morning, and went off in a great rush: didn't even wait for his eggs. But he found a moment to tell me his wonderful news; he'd do that no matter how late he was! I've been thinking all day about my new daughter."

At home Mrs. Chamberlin listened without comment of any kind, rather priding herself upon her restraint; but to Marjory her silence was the "I told you so!" brand and she found it intensely irritating.

Later in the afternoon Marjory ran over to Mrs. Porter's again. During the conversation she learned that her sister-in-law had sent over jelly and broth for the invalid, and had spent fully an hour at her telephone calling up various places from which she hoped to glean information.

"Lil's bark is worse than her bite after all," she commented, with a pleased smile. "She prides herself on being practical — at least that's what she calls it — but she's not hateful like — Oh! I forgot!"

"Forgot what?" Mrs. Porter questioned, noting with surprise the spot of angry red that burned the girl's cheeks.

"Oh, nothing! It's not important."

"Go on, dear! What are Mrs. Thorne's sentiments on the subject? I'd like to hear them."

"Why, how did you know it was Mrs. Thorne?" Marjory's dark eyes opened wide with amazement.

"I happen to know the lady, that's all. I've been associated with her in club and church work for years, Marjory, and nothing brings out a woman's real nature more unreservedly, not even bridge! If there's a vulnerable spot in one's armor, Mrs. Thorne will find it, and to a woman of her stamp every one wears an unprotected heel. I suppose she thinks I'm foolish to harbor the little stranger?"

"She said — Oh! Mrs. Porter, how can women be so cruel to each other? Why she even insinuated that Miss Mystery might not be quite — quite right, you know."

"Mentally, you mean?"

"No, morally. Isn't it a shame!"

"Did she say that to you, Marjory?" Mrs. Porter spoke quietly, but the indignant red that mantled her cheeks rivaled that in Marjory's own.

"No, but Bess did, and she was quoting her mother's words."

"What did you say?" Mrs. Porter watched the girl curiously, as she put the question.

Marjory's eyes flashed with anger. She knew a spade when she saw it and she was sensible enough to call it by its name. Hers was the purity of innocence not ignorance.

"I told Bess that even if she had been the worst kind of a bad woman she was in trouble now and needed help. I just reminded her that Jesus didn't turn away from Mary Magdalene! I said she ought to feel nothing but sorrow for the poor little thing.

Just imagine losing all the precious memories of a lifetime!"

She spoke as though both she and Miss Mystery were well past the half-century post on life's journey, with a long trail of reminiscence behind them, but the shining eyes and tremulous lips told Mrs. Porter that she was thinking of one precious memory — a memory of very recent acquisition.

"What did Bess say to that?" she queried, smiling in sympathy with the girl's earnestness.

"She said if she was an idiot she hadn't any memories to lose, and if she's been a bad woman it would be a good thing to lose them. Now what can you say to such reasoning as that? Miss Mystery isn't bad. Any one can read that in her face, don't you think so? She may not be quite — quite right in her mind, but I don't believe that either."

"Neither do I, and neither does Dr. Guthrie," Mrs. Porter agreed. "At all events I intend to take care of her as long as she needs it, whether Mrs. Thorne approves or not."

"And I'll help you. I'm so glad you didn't send her to the hospital."

"Thank you!" Mrs. Porter drew the great girl down to her lap and kissed her. "If Win had searched the world over he couldn't have pleased me better in his choice than this powdery little neighbor of mine. I've had my eye on you for a long time, my lady, so I know. I'll try to be a good mother to you, dear."

"And I'll try to be a good daughter," Marjory answered softly. "And oh! I do so want to be a good

wife to Win! You know — the strong, sensible kind — not one of those who fly off the handle every least little thing. I want to be broad enough and noble enough to rise above petty worries."

Mrs. Porter sighed involuntarily.

"It's the petty worries that loom largest in life, I'm afraid. They have to be lived with day in and day out. The woman who would give her very life to save her loved one cannot always hold her peace under provocation. But I don't want to discourage you, child. You are starting out with the right ambition, only don't forget that you are engaged to marry a man, not an angel. In fact I've never yet seen the wings that would fit a real man — and Win is that, bless him! — nor the halo, either, so don't try to adjust any misfits."

"I won't," Marjory promised with the positiveness of the untried. She even laughed heartily at the idea, not knowing that before the week was over she would be determinedly screwing away in a vain endeavor to fasten angelic appendages where no such appendages had ever before been placed.

CHAPTER IV

ENTER GREEN EYES!

"Would but some winged Angel ere too late
Arrest the yet unfolded Roll of Fate,
And make the stern Recorder otherwise
Enregister . . ."

Marjory found Miss Mystery so fascinating that it was some time before she was able to tear herself away. When she at last started for home she was surprised to encounter Winthrop at the gate.

"Why, I didn't know it was so late!" she exclaimed in confusion.

"It isn't very late," was his careless reply; but he forebore to explain that an overmastering desire to see her again had sent him to the ferry several boats ahead of his usual one.

Marjory began an animated though disconnected recital of the day's happenings before he could get a word in edgewise. She was plainly nervous. The memory of the previous evening seemed to affect her speech; she became almost incoherent, but she kept on talking.

"That's all right," he remarked in injured tones, when she was forced to pause for breath; "but where do I come in? Have you forgotten the duty due to your future lord and master? Is any voiceless wan-

derer, even the Sleeping Beauty herself, of sufficient importance to make you omit the pleasing interchange of courtesies established by custom in cases like ours? Not a bit of it, my lady! I claim my pound of — kisses!"

"Oh, Win, don't! please don't! Some one's coming down the avenue."

"Down, you say? Then we'll step behind this bush. I prefer greater seclusion myself, but in this case publicity was forced upon me. You darling! How I love you! I can scarcely realize that you're mine, signed, sealed —"

"But not delivered — yet!" she interrupted saucily, as she dodged swiftly past his outstretched arm.

By a flank movement he reached her side and drew her close into his embrace. "How could we ever have disagreed?" he murmured tenderly. "It hurts me to think of the time we've wasted, darling, but that's ancient history now."

"Of course it is," she agreed with utmost promptness, ignoring the fact that history repeats itself. "It's a good thing, perhaps, that we did wrangle a bit; we're rid of it now, forever."

"But here's something you won't find so easy to get rid of, my lady," he retorted in triumphant tones, holding her fast with one hand while he searched for something in his pocket, and finally produced a small green velvet case. "Here! this is to bind our bargain. It's my brand on the dearest little sweetheart a man ever had. Do you know what it says to other men?"

"To other men?" she repeated reproachfully. "Why, how foolish! There aren't any other men, now, and there never will be. But what does it say, Win?"

"All rights reserved!"

She laughed softly as she examined the ring with a pleased light in her eyes. It was a large solitaire that sparkled brilliantly as the rays of the setting sun fell on it. Within the circlet was engraved in tiny letters: "To my dear one."

"Does it fit?" he asked anxiously, as he took it from her and placed it reverently upon her finger.

"Perfectly. How did you guess the size?"

"I didn't guess it; I measured your finger."

"Measured my finger!" she repeated incredulously. "Why, Win, how could you do that?"

"The night I tried to take that piece of cord away from you," he confessed. "Don't you remember? You insisted on tying a string around my finger to make me remember the plays you wanted me to bring out, and I said I wouldn't wear it unless you wore one, too."

"But afterwards you said you'd let me off."

"Of course! I had the measure, then."

"But, Win, that was two weeks ago! I hadn't said I'd marry you, then. Why, I hadn't even thought of you in — in that way, honestly I hadn't!"

"But I'd thought of you in that way," he answered, with a masterfulness that somehow appealed to her.

"But how did you know I'd say 'yes'?" she asked shyly.

"I took chances," was the cool reply. "Marriage is a good deal of a gamble, they say, so I thought I might as well begin with the ring. I'm glad you like it."

"It's a beautiful ring and I love it," she explained to him with earnest emphasis; "but Win, let's keep the secret to ourselves just a wee bit longer, will you? It makes life seem so — so serious, to be engaged. But I like it," she hastened to assure him, "only I don't want — everybody — to know it just yet."

He consented; the secret was dear to him, too, but her disjointed appeal occurred to him later amidst events that gave a double meaning to it.

With a final look of possessive admiration, she removed the handsome solitaire from her finger, sighing a little as she did so. Replacing it in its satin-lined receptacle, she slipped the case into her pocket, keeping one hand on it as a precautionary measure. It would be a dire misfortune to lose a ring of any kind, but to lose an engagement ring! . . . She shivered at the mere thought.

"Oh, Win, you haven't seen her yet, have you?" she asked suddenly, after they had remained silent for a few moments, wrapped in love's oblivion.

"Who?" he questioned, with sublime disregard for former Herculean stunts in the High School English class. The bewildering ecstasy due to the nearness of his loved one had driven everything else from his mind, even the advent of the mysterious stranger.

Marjory gazed at him with a reproachful look in her great dark eyes.

"Oh! I beg your pardon! You mean the weary

wanderer! I'll tell you my theory in regard to that mysterious visitation," he went on with mock seriousness, realizing from her flushed and pouting face that he was teasing her. "She's an aviatrix, Marjory. Her hi-plane was wrecked just overhead and she was fortunate enough to land in the Kid's den. See!"

"I see you're nothing but an overgrown boy!" Marjory returned, laughing heartily at his nonsense.

"Did the doctor send her to the hospital to-day, or was she claimed by her friends?"

"Neither. She's still here."

"Still here!" he repeated in surprise. "That won't do. Mother ought not be burdened with a complete stranger, and a sick one at that. Where is the aviatrix? Trot her out for inspection, Marjory. I'll reason with the Mater later."

"She's up in Chester's den where we first found her. Mrs. Porter let her stay there so she wouldn't be disturbed. You're not 'in' now, Will. Your mother's dead in love with Miss Mystery. I tell you what I'll do: I'll run up-stairs again and see if the coast is clear. If it is, I'll whistle: then you slip up quietly and have a peep at her."

"All right, only don't expect me to join the ring-a-die chorus, will you!"

"Just wait: we'll see whether you do or not!"

She sped back to the house and disappeared within the side door by which she could gain the upper regions with least fear of meeting any of the family. A moment later a low, clear whistle floated down to Winthrop. It was their own call: "Tu whee! Tu whee! Tu whee!—tu whee!—tu whee!" He

from the concussion, but he isn't sure. She may be an idiot for all we know. Mrs. Thorne says she's escaped from some asylum."

Winthrop apostrophized the omniscient Mrs. Thorne in terms more strong than endearing. For a man who prided himself upon moderation in language, he really distinguished himself. Marjory winced involuntarily, although she herself had felt equally angry earlier in the day.

"She's certainly not an idiot," he ended conclusively. "Why, look at her face! One glance is enough to prove that! We've got to clear up this mystery somehow."

"Dr. Guthrie wanted to send her to the hospital, but —"

"To the hospital?" Winthrop interrupted in sharp remonstrance. "Certainly not!" Unconsciously the two had changed sides in the argument. "Why, it would be inhuman. Of course we'll keep her here. I'll set to work at once to see what I can find out about her. I only wish I'd begun last night."

"Instead of going to the Dramatic Club and proposing to me!" sprang to Marjory's lips, but she refrained from putting the ugly thought into words.

"A girl like that can't drop out of her life in this way and not be missed, that's one thing certain," Winthrop continued in positive tones. "I wish I had something more to go on, but never mind! I'll find out sooner or later, and she's safe here with us in the meantime."

The "us" was not lost upon his listener.

"Of course, a beauty, a raving, tearing beauty,

is less trouble for his mother to take care of than a homely woman would be," sneered the tempter in Marjory's ear, but again she refrained from voicing his insinuations. Perhaps she was already beginning on the adjustment whose burden must be shouldered by the weaker sex. Yet in spite of her restraint, the possessive finality of Winthrop's words provided enticing bait for the green-eyed monster hovering near by. It drew his victim closer and closer to him; before the interview ended she was hard and fast in his devil-fish grasp. The innocent cause of her mental unrest suddenly became distasteful to her; the red lips, curved and slightly parted, lost their helpless appeal; the lonely wayfarer was unaccountably metamorphosed into a settled menace to her happiness. Had any one insinuated that she, Marjory Chamberlin, the most popular girl in St. George, was jealous, she would have denied the charge strenuously, and in all good faith, too. She was unable to catalogue the uncomfortable resentment that oppressed her, but she realized in a dim, uncertain fashion, that the Winthrop who was teasingly indifferent and plainly bored by her account of the mysterious guest was somehow vastly more to her liking than this Winthrop, the knight, eager to draw the lance in the fair stranger's behalf.

"Come down, now!" she commanded, a note of harshness in her voice hitherto unknown to it. "Your mother wants her to sleep."

She descended the stairs rapidly, but paused a moment when they reached the lower hall. Win-

throp, however, was too deeply engrossed in the problem so unexpectedly set before him to note her expectant hesitation. He strode on to the telephone table and began an eager search through the address book. Marjory's lips trembled but she flung a curt good night at him to which he responded absently, and hurried out, trying to stifle the hurt, angry feeling that brought such an uncomfortable choking sensation to her throat. Her buoyant interest in Miss Mystery disappeared, and to Mrs. Chamberlin's eager inquiries for further news she vouchsafed only the most meager replies. Her sister noticed her listless indifference but ascribed it to discouragement over her lack of success that morning. Miss Chamberlin was very apt to go from the heights to the depths.

All during supper Marjory wrestled with the uncomfortable demon that had taken possession of her. She was foolish! There was nothing to feel hurt about! Naturally Winthrop would be interested in such a pitiful case, in his own home, too: she couldn't respect him if he were not. She wanted to marry a real man with live sympathies, not a lukewarm imitation of a man. Finally she reasoned herself into a more comfortable frame of mind, largely induced by the certainty that Winthrop would be over that night. Of course he would come: a newly engaged man was not likely to spend the very first evening anywhere but at his fiancée's side. So sure was she of the correctness of her own reasoning that when the bell rang, soon after supper, she did not wait for Tekla the unhurried, to answer the summons, but

dashed down-stairs and threw wide the front door, her eyes glowing with pleasure, her lips trembling with the rush of welcoming words.

"Come right — Oh! it's you!"

She made a valiant effort to keep the disappointment out of her voice as she added: "Come in, Ches!" It was early; Winthrop was hardly likely to call before eight, even on this night of nights.

"I can't," the boy replied regretfully. "I've got a regular landslide of algebra to do to-night, and about a thousand pages of Cæsar — more or less. I just came over on an errand. I want to know if you'll lend —"

"My pony?" she finished the sentence teasingly. "Oh, fie! You want to prance through that Latin of yours instead of digging your way through."

"I don't!" the boy flung back in indignant denial. "I wouldn't use a pony if I had one, so there! I'd rather fail."

"Yes, you would!" she repeated with tantalizing emphasis.

"I would, too!"

"I said you would." Her laugh rang out so infectiously that Chester was forced to join in, even against his will, though with a muttered "Stung again!" Then he explained his errand.

"Mother sent her love and wants to know if you have any dressing-gown or 'come-on-easy' that you can spare for — you know." He pointed over his shoulder. "She's wearing Win's old bathrobe just now. And mother says if you'll put in a night-gown, too, she'll return it as soon as she gets some

from town. She's afraid she'll lose her in her night-gown." The boy chuckled.

"All right, I know what she wants," Marjory responded readily. "Just wait a moment until I get the things for you; it won't take long. Shall I send Marjy down to talk to you?"

Marjy was a year behind Chester in school, but no one in his own class equaled her in his estimation, although, like most boys of the bashful age, he would have endured tortures rather than confess it.

"Never mind," he replied, with as much indifference as he could muster, boyish shyness conquering his desire to see her. "I — I've got to hurry back just as soon as you get the things. I'd have called up so's you could have 'em ready, only you can't get any show at our 'phone now."

"Why?" Marjory asked curiously.

"So many people keep ringing us up to ask about — *her* — you know," again the backward gesture; "it keeps the 'phone buzzing."

"Oh! so that's it! Well, I'll hurry! Come in and amuse Lorito while you're waiting," she called over the banister with a significant laugh.

"Lorito be hanged!" Chester muttered, making a cautious advance towards a huge parrot cage that stood on the table in the bay window. "You ought to be called 'Cannibalito' you old fraud!" he apostrophized the great green beauty that peeped up at him from its perch, its head cocked on one side saucily. "I hope that last nip you took out of my finger gave you dyspepsia good and plenty. If ever Bugs gets a hold of you you'll be a deader all right!"

"Come here, Bugs!" the parrot mimicked. "Down, Bugs! Get a hustle on!" Then he proceeded to give a very creditable imitation of a yapping dog.

"He'll hustle you so hard some day you won't know what hurt you!" the boy promised fiercely.

Just then the parrot's mistress appeared at the head of the stairs with the teasing inquiry: "Isn't Lorito a dear?"

Chester refrained from committing himself, but relieved his feelings by a succession of tantalizing gestures towards the "dear" that threatened to send it into convulsions of impotent rage.

Marjory had been as good as her word. The suitcase she carried contained not only the articles requested, but several other cherished, girlish possessions unflinchingly offered on the sacrificial altar. During her absence, short as it was, she had fought a hard fight with the green-eyed monster and had routed him with great slaughter — for the time being!

"I'm silly!" she thought, as she hurried from bureau to closet in her quest. "He's a dear boy, anyway." Her encomium might have referred to Chester, who was at that moment trying his best to rouse Lorito to even greater fury by prodding him gently with a gas-lighter he had found in the corner of the hall. "He's just like his mother, always thoughtful and considerate towards everybody. A good son makes a good husband, they say, and he's certainly a perfect son. Besides, I wouldn't like it if he didn't take an interest. I hate a clam!"

As she descended with her burden, she queried casually: "Winthrop at the bowling club, Ches?"

"Nope! He's been trying to find out something about *her,* but he hasn't succeeded yet." Chester always referred to the stranger in awed italics. "He was writing a lot of letters to New York about her when I left — to the steamship companies, and all sorts of places."

"Oh!" Marjory's lips trembled so that it was with difficulty she acknowledged the boy's thanks as he shouldered the suitcase and marched towards the door, Lorito calling after him: "Get a hustle on, Bugs! Get a hustle on, Bugs!"

With a brief good night the boy started down the steps, but halted at the bottom and hurriedly remounted. Marjory waited while he began an embarrassed murmur that was quite unintelligible.

"What's that, Ches?" she asked, wondering what made the boy look so hot and uncomfortable. "I don't understand."

"Say, I'm awful glad about — you know what," he replied, looking everywhere except into the face of his listener.

"About Miss Mystery, you mean?"

"No. About you and Win."

"Why, how did you know?" she demanded, taken off her guard. "Did Win tell you, or was it your mother?"

"No one told me. I — I guessed it."

"You guessed it?" Marjory's tone was plainly skeptical. "You must be a Yankee, Ches! I don't see how —"

"Well, I — I partly guessed it. Anyhow, old Win went about whispering to mother and grinning for all the world like the cat that ate the canary, he was so stuck on himself. Besides —" he hesitated a moment in boyish embarrassment, then blurted out the whole truth: "— I happened to be back of the lilac bushes when Win came home to-night."

"Oh!" It was Marjory's turn to become flushed and embarrassed.

"I just thought I'd tell you that I — I'm awfully glad it's — it's you!" the boy finished determinedly.

"Thank you, Chester! Please keep it a secret for a little while, will you?"

"Sure!"

Marjory leaned forward and kissed him before he had a chance to duck, then with a mischievous "Good night, brother!" she slipped into the house and closed the door.

The happy smile called into being by the boy's words lingered on her lips all through the rest of the evening, though several false alarms made her start and listen for familiar footsteps. It went upstairs with her, and stayed on duty while she knelt at her bedside and mumbled the prayers she had always said ever since her childish days. But that night she ended with a new and fervent petition: "Bless HIM!" She felt it unnecessary to designate. In spite of daily meaningless mumbles, an abiding faith lay deep in her heart; and she knew that He knew.

CHAPTER V

THE WANDERING JEWEL

"Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!"

During the weeks immediately following the advent of the mysterious stranger, the Porters, aided by St. George in general and the members of the W. P. C. in particular, spared no pains to discover her identity, but not the faintest clew rewarded their efforts. Winthrop persistently inserted personals in the various New York and suburban dailies, and even in the papers of several other large cities. At first these were discreetly worded to convey information only to interested parties, but later they were a plain statement of the occurrence and a request for information that might lead to a solution of the mystery. As usual in such cases he was deluged with answers, but freed from the chaff of surmise, they amounted to nothing tangible upon which he might act.

Failing along this tack he veered to writing personal letters whenever a mysterious disappearance was chronicled. He also secured a formidable list of sanatoriums, private hospitals and asylums in and near New York, to each of which he telephoned or wrote. As a last resort he followed Dr. Guthrie's

suggestion and put the case into the hands of a well-known detective agency, but at the end of four weeks of strenuous effort she was still "Miss Mystery"; they knew just as much about her as they did the day she arrived, and that was nothing at all. Winthrop was more dollars out of pocket than he cared to think about, not to mention the hours he had given to the search, and the miles and miles he had traversed in his effort to unravel promising clews. All he had to show for his reckless expenditure of time, strength and money was a collection of freak letters that would have been of inestimable value to any one attempting a treatise on "How Not to Trace Lost Persons!" Unfortunately Winthrop knew of no one whose literary ambitions were directed along that particular line, so at the end of the month's fruitless endeavor he surveyed his collection ruefully, and with an observation or two that could scarcely be comprised under "news that's fit to print," consigned them all to the tender mercies of the furnace.

In the meantime, however, the whole family had succumbed to the charms of the young stranger; so much so, in fact, that when Dr. Guthrie, for the second time tentatively suggested her removal to a private sanatorium, they fell upon him tooth and nail and routed him with great slaughter.

"But she must be a heavy expense," he expostulated, "and it is not fair to burden you with the care of a total stranger, even though she will need little attention from now on. As I said before, this case is of peculiar interest to me. It's a most un-

usual development. I'm selfishly glad to have the chance to observe it unhampered by interference of any sort. In return you surely ought to permit me to shoulder the expense incidental to the poor child's keep. You are doing far more than your share in the loving care you are giving her. That will help more than medicine towards her recovery if —" He broke off with an impatient sigh. The case baffled him, but there was much of the bulldog in the good doctor, where professional matters were concerned; he did not easily relax his grip.

"I've arranged with Winthrop to pay the detective agency," he went on. "That boy would have bankrupted himself in his zeal if I hadn't held him down to his promise. Now I propose to settle this part satisfactorily, then I can study the case at my leisure, without being disturbed by a troublesome conscience."

Mrs. Porter was broad enough to acknowledge the truth of the doctor's argument, but nevertheless she refused other aid than the professional services he was giving so freely.

"I'm glad to have her here," she added in her simple earnest way. "And she's gaining every day, don't you think so?"

"I certainly do!" he replied emphatically, smiling at the good lady's pride in her nursing. "She's in almost perfect condition physically, but —"

"She's gaining mentally, too!" It was Aunt Mig's voice that boomed forth in belligerent assertion. She had entered the room in time to hear the doctor's last words. "She's gaining mentally, too.

I can see a gradual improvement, even though there's no one thing you can put your hand on. She may not be able to tell us who she is nor where she came from yet, but she's not an idiot, and she never has been, so there!"

"Hear! Hear!" the doctor applauded teasingly. Aunt Mig's eyes flashed but she refrained from rising to the bait as he hoped.

Far from fulfilling the doctor's predictions, Aunt Mig had been deeply interested in Miss Mystery from the first. To clear away the clouds that temporarily obscured her faculties and so help to discover her identity became a problem of paramount importance to her; she set to work upon it with all the determination she brought to bear upon the problems of her own life. That for the time being it seemed to baffle solving only increased her determination. As the days went by in fruitless endeavor, she vented her surplus activity in making the girl comfortable. The Browning Circle was the first to go by the board. It's chairman, who detested sewing and never made even the simplest article for herself, needed those culture-crowded afternoons to devise dainty garments for the blue-eyed girl in Chester's den, the girl whose delight was plainly evidenced by beaming smiles that made mere words unnecessary. Even the bridge club, the one near-frivolity in Miss Mig's somewhat austere life, saw her no more; she was busy teaching several fascinating varieties of solitaire to the invalid.

Mrs. Porter noted her sister-in-law's attitude with fervent though unvoiced thanksgiving, for had Aunt

Mig taken Mrs. Thorne's stand and railed against the stranger as an intruder, an unnecessary expense, when the family strong-box was in no danger of bursting its bond from overcrowding, she would have made the whole family miserable, as they knew by experience. She had an exasperatingly persistent nature. Where it was a question of right and wrong as she conceived it, she could hammer away in season and out. Constant dropping wears away a stone, but Aunt Mig believed that constant hammering accomplishes the same result and makes better time over the operation.

Meanwhile Miss Mystery had improved steadily. The emaciated look disappeared. Her cheeks rounded into alluring curves and flushed with clear, healthy color. The dimples called into being by her smiles were on exhibition frequently. The blue eyes sparkled with life and the mouth lost its hopeless droop. As yet she had not really laughed aloud, but more than once some nonsense of Chester's had brought a faint little chuckle. She and the boy were firm friends. By the end of the month she was as dainty a picture of healthy girlhood as one would care to see, but no spoken word had as yet issued from the curved lips, although the quick light of comprehension, and the nod with which she replied showed perfect understanding.

By degrees she began to take an interest in her surroundings — a voiceless interest, it is true, but with nothing of sullenness in its silence. She was alertly ready to help Mrs. Porter in the thousand and one tasks that fall to the lot of the housekeeper

in a large family with but one maid. She specially loved to work amid the late-blooming posies and would flit from plant to plant, openly exulting over any special treasures among the blossoms. As she grew stronger, it became her task to arrange the flowers and branches of autumnal foliage, and fill the vases that decorated the old-fashioned hall and parlors.

More than once during those first weeks after her recovery, Mrs. Porter surprised her standing still in the midst of some task, her forehead puckered into the deepest kind of a frown, the small hands clenched tight in the effort to bring back her errant memory. On one of these occasions the good lady watched her furtively from the friendly shelter of the portières. She saw her gaze into space with a concentration so intense it seemed that it must produce definite results, then suddenly, with a low moan of anguish, she sank to her knees, and burying her head in the great armchair, burst into a passion of racking sobs that threatened to tear the small frame to pieces.

In an instant Mrs. Porter was beside her, and had gathered the childish form up in her strong arms. Pressing the curly head against her motherly bosom, she soothed the girl with loving endearments, until the paroxysm was over.

"Were you trying to remember, Missy?" she queried gently.

The girl nodded, the slow tears falling from her half-closed eyes.

"Do you know who I am?"

Another nod, more vehement than the first.

"See if you can say my name, dear," she urged gently.

The eager lips parted, but no sound came. The despairing look once more blotted all the brightness from the young face.

"Perhaps you could write some word for me," Mrs. Porter suggested tentatively. "Wait! I'll get a paper and a pencil."

It was the trial she had been longing to make, but the doctor had discouraged her since the failure of its first attempt a day or two after Miss Mystery's arrival.

"Wait until she is stronger before you put her to the test," he had advised. "If it fails, it might undo all she has gained."

Only the day before had he removed this interdict, leaving the time and manner of making it to her own discretion. Now that it had actually come, she was so agitated between hope and fear that she almost tottered as she hurried over to the combination bookcase and writing-desk in the hall and returned with a large writing pad and a pencil. Her fingers trembled nervously when she spread the pad open on the girl's lap and thrust the pencil into her outstretched hand.

Mystery looked up into the kind, gray eyes with a bright smile. Her fingers promptly closed over the pencil; her face took on a look of earnest concentration, as she bent over the paper, the pencil poised, ready. Mrs. Porter's hope revived as she noted her attitude, but it was dashed again in short

order. The brain refused to issue the necessary commands; after several futile attempts the pencil dropped from her nerveless fingers. She shook her head slowly with a gesture that was pitiful in its utter hopelessness.

"Never mind, dearie," Mrs. Porter murmured soothingly. "It will come some day. I know it will. We must wait patiently."

Under her gentle encouragement the despairing mood lightened, but the attempt had left the girl weak and wan. And Mrs. Porter herself was discouraged in spite of her hopeful prophecies. From the start she had set her heart on bringing back the girl's memory and eventually restoring her to her friends, although even in those few weeks she had begun to realize that it would be surrendering something very precious from her own life.

That there had been no inquiry for the girl in all this time began to strike her as ominous. Was she absolutely alone in the world? How had she lived before her advent among them? Not by manual labor, that much was certain; the small hands proclaimed it conclusively, just as they attested to the fact that their owner was of gentle birth. Hands are an infallible index. In her inmost heart Mrs. Porter had determined that no matter what the outcome of the investigation, her "girlie," as she lovingly called her, should never lack a home or a friend. The girl's pitiful infirmity only made her appeal the stronger.

"She's like a frail craft adrift with a broken rudder," she thought with that poetry of imagery so

often hidden under prosaic exteriors. "And she's passing through such troubled waters, poor little thing! Suppose she never recovers her memory! Suppose she never speaks! What a terrible blight on her whole life! It's hard to understand why such things should be, but 'whatever is, is right!'" she added, her staunch faith in the All-Seeing One unshaken.

A day or two after the unsuccessful test, Marjory ran over just before lunch time to deliver a message to Mrs. Porter. Mrs. Chamberlin had noticed how seldom she went to the Porters of late, but had ascribed it to maidenly modesty. The conflict the girl was waging with her second self was carefully concealed from her sister-in-law, although that matter-of-fact lady would scarcely have understood it had it been laid bare before her. To her it would have seemed simply the groundless jealousy of youthful inexperience. Nothing short of actual elopement on the part of Mr. Chamberlin could have aroused her to any pitch of excitement, and even in that remote contingency she would have found a large measure of consolation in the fact that he had taken neither her daughter, her cook, nor her preserve closet with him! On the other hand, easy-going Frank Chamberlin was the most devoted of husbands. Some men prefer the mollusk type. At least it conduces to a comfortable calm that keeps the atmosphere of the home circle free from cyclonic disturbances.

That morning Miss Mystery had been helping Mrs. Porter in her strenuous bi-yearly crusade

against six months' accumulated "trash" in the third story. In spite of her mute protests, she had been given the guest room in the second story adjourning Mrs. Porter's own room, as soon as she was able to be moved. Chester's den in which she had first sought refuge, lay directly in path of the morning's raid, and had been forced to surrender more than one of its treasures to the invaders. But the boy lay in wait, at noon, and recaptured his possessions on their march to the trash barrels. With the wisdom of experience he pledged the sympathetic Katy to secrecy and carried them back to their accustomed place, without allowing himself to vaunt openly. By this wise course his mother's satisfied sense of having "cleared things out" remained undisturbed, as did also the moth-eaten squirrel skins, the great pile of posters, and the baseballs freely shedding their stuffing, thanks to Bugs' energetic explorations into their interior. Damaged though they were, they were still dear to the boyish heart of their owner. He "might want 'em" sometime! Anyhow he didn't like his traps meddled with.

When Marjory entered the sitting-room, Miss Mystery lay on the roomy old couch fast asleep, tired out from her unaccustomed exertions, even though she had enjoyed the rummage with all a true woman's zest. Marjory stood looking down upon her, noting with a sharp throb of envious appreciation, the perfection of the picture she made: the long curling dark lashes resting against the pink and white cheeks; the curved red lips, and the firm

little chin, which redeemed the whole from any suggestion of dollishness.

As she gazed intently at the sleeper, whose innocence appealed to her in spite of her uneasy fears, a dimple twinkled in the curved cheek, then a joyous smile spread over the pretty face, the lips moved, and to Marjory's amazement, the girl spoke aloud!

She could scarcely believe the evidence of her senses. At first she thought Miss Mystery must be awake, but another glance convinced her that she was still sleeping soundly. But at least she had misunderstood what she said; her overwrought imagination was playing tricks with her hearing. She had almost succeeded in convincing herself that this was true when it came again, clear and unmistakable, just one syllable: "Win!"

"Win!" Marjory gasped in repetition. The little word seemed to shatter with its light breath the whole edifice of her happiness. Of course Mystery had come to love him! How could she help it? Who could live with him and not love him? But he? Like a flash there passed in review before her a number of trivial happenings which, with this word as a key, fitted into an all-enlightening whole. For in spite of everything, Marjory had been hugging to her heart the hope that she only imagined things were not the same as they had been at first, between herself and Win. Now she thought of Winthrop's interest in the stranger from the very moment he first saw her; his change of base on the hospital idea; his untiring efforts to discover her identity; his preoccupation of late. Oh! it was all

pitifully plain, plain as the garish sunlight on the window-sill, but unlike the sunlight it was bringing no joyous message. Instead it was illuminating the tragedy of her life.

She knew that she ought to waken the sleeper, ought to tell the joyous news to Mrs. Porter, but her outraged heart protested. Fearing that she would betray herself in the passion of jealousy that had taken possession of her, she fled from the house. In her blind agony she did not even make the short detour that led over the lawn, but tramped ruthlessly across the tennis court, leaving a succession of heel-marks on its dew-soaked surface. Once at home she rushed up to her own room and closed the door. Throwing herself prone across the bed she gave way to her feelings, not in groans or cries, but in bitter thoughts that excoriated her very soul. She refused lunch on the plea of a headache, something so unusual that it worried even placid Mrs. Chamberlin.

The hours that followed left their impress upon her nature for all time. She waged a battle, fierce though soundless, save for one or two unconquerable sobs of anguish. It was a struggle that seemed to drain her very life blood. Again and again pity for Miss Mystery, forlorn, afflicted, the veriest bit of flotsam on life's current, knocked at her heart, only to be sternly repulsed. Pity! What need had she of pity? Had she not won Winthrop who was worth more than speech, memory, everything? How blind she herself had been! But it was remorselessly clear now; every word he had

spoken of late — even more the things left unsaid — seemed to proclaim aloud the truth. She tried to remember Mystery's infirmity, her lost years, the terrible uncertainty of her future, but all to no purpose. Persistently before her flashed a new picture, a picture whose tantalizing beauty she acknowledged with heart-rending misgivings. It was Mystery herself, still memory-less, perhaps, but no longer mute, blossoming from day to day into greater beauty and charm, her love itself the strongest lure of all.

Then she prayed — not the meaningless mumble that formed her daily devotion, but a prayer wrung from her very soul — to be kept from envy and harshness, to be given strength to rejoice in the thought of this imprisoned soul bursting its bonds at last. But oh! if the quickening word had been any other than her lover's name!

"He's mine! He is mine!" she muttered fiercely. "I won't let her take him from me!" But even as she spoke she realized that love neither comes nor goes at command; it knows no master. She had entered into woman's estate; as the doctor prophesied, girlhood's care-free days were over.

In the end her better self conquered. She acknowledged that it was her duty to tell of the morning's occurrence for Mystery's sake. As to Winthrop, she decided to let matters take their course, trusting that time would, in some miraculous way, smooth out the difficulty. At least she would not precipitate a decision. She had no mind to apply the spark which might wreck her life's happiness.

But even as she reached this sensible conclusion and was trying to nerve herself to the distasteful task she had before her, she received proof positive of the futility of her reasoning. All her comforting conclusions tumbled down like a house of cards, burying renewed hope in the ruins.

It came from a most unexpected source. A shrill whistle sounded outside her window. Instinctively she sprang up, thinking that it might be Winthrop's signal. It was not yet five o'clock, and he seldom caught a boat earlier than the five-thirty, but still — An instant later she realized that it was Chester signaling to Marjy, whose room was next to her own, and chided herself for her foolishness. Soon she heard her niece's answering whistle but she remained at the window, all unconscious of eavesdropping. But as she listened to the ensuing conversation the indulgent smile on her lips faded; the look of misery that replaced it was the index to an aching heart.

"Hello, Marjy!" Chester was speaking in excited staccato. "Lean out! Want to tell you something."

"What's the matter?" Marjy demanded, her curiosity aroused by his mysterious manner.

"Say, *she* spoke to-day!"

Marjy needed no elucidation of the indefinite "she;"—to her, as to Chester, it referred to but one person, Miss Mystery.

"She didn't!"

"Sure she did! Cross my heart, hope I may die if she didn't!"

Marjory started in surprise. How had they found it out? Only she and Miss Mystery were in the room that morning; of that she was absolutely positive. Why had she not been open and above-board at the time! Her later resolve was of no use now.

"Oh! Ches! goody! goody!" Marjy's words were ecstatic, her voice all atremble with excitement as she put a rapid succession of questions. "What did she say? Who is she? Where did she come from? Will she go away again? How did she happen to speak? Did you hear her?"

"Go on, Marjy!" Chester urged sarcastically. "You've only asked about ten questions, already; better get a few more off your mind while you're about it."

"You might tell me what she said, Mr. Smarty!" Marjy retorted, in sharp resentment, but changed suddenly to a wheedling: "Please, Ches!" The other Marjory, beyond the partition, strained her ears to catch the boy's reply.

"She said 'Win!' just like that." Chester's tone was triumphant. "Mother and Aunt Mig both heard her."

"'Win!' You don't say! Shows who's been in her thoughts all right, doesn't it?" Marjy ended with a girlish trill of enjoyment over the romantic situation, not suspecting for an instant that her laughter was bitterest derision to the unseen auditor, who was wondering how she had ever thought she loved her niece. "Was that all she said, just that one word?"

"Yep! that was all; but even one word means a lot when she hasn't spoken at all since she's been here, don't you think so? Aunt Mig almost danced a jig. She even telephoned over to Win. Ten cents wasted, but he'll be wild over it, too."

"I wonder how she happened to say 'Win?' Was she calling him?"

"No! Mother was trying on the white dress she and Aunt Mig are making for her — you know — it's one of those funny things with the waist way up here." Marjory could not see the speaker's gesture, but she conjectured that he was illustrating his idea of an Empire frock. "And say, she looked like a peach in it, Marjy, honest she did; just like she'd stepped down from some old picture. Mother fastened it all on, then led her up to the big pier glass and let her peep in. When she saw herself she laughed right out loud, and that was when she said it."

"Guess she wanted Win to see her in her new dress," Marjy hazarded.

"Of course. She's awfully fond of him. Why, she jumps and looks up every time his name's mentioned lately. Mother noticed it first. I heard her telling Aunt Mig about it. Since then I've tried it several times myself, just to be sure."

"She's fallen in love with him," Marjy declared in solemn ecstasy, all the romance of her nature delighting in the incident.

"No, I don't think it's that, exactly," the boy replied, with evident hesitation. He was too loyal to his trust to betray his greater knowledge, although

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he fairly itched to do it. "You see Win's done a raft of things for her, so she can't help thinking a lot of him. I'll bet he's tickled to death. Well, so long! I've got to tackle my algebra. One of the problems is a regular corker, but the others are a cinch. Just wait until you get into second year math!" he added patronizingly, on the strength of his extra grade. "One A's just play compared to it. So long!"

Marjory's face was a study in conflicts. She was spared the confession to which she had nerved herself, but it was small gain after all. That Miss Mystery had repeated herself made the truth the more obvious. Only love for the owner of the name could account for it.

"Everybody in St. George will hear the wonderful news now," she thought, with a bitter sneer. "And they'll all think just as Marjy does. They can't help it. Besides it's true; it must be true! Oh! I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"

But soon came the comforting remembrance that no matter what her little world might surmise, the engagement had not been made public. Winthrop's absorption in Miss Mystery's affairs and the extra work incident to his new partnership, had cut off even his ordinary attentions to her since that wonderful night. She blessed the inspiration that had led her to refrain from the announcement.

"I won't stand between him and his happiness," she murmured brokenly; "I love him too well for that. But, oh! how can I bear to give him up!"

While the sacrificial impulse was hot within her,

she lifted a small velvet case from her dresser drawer, and opening it gazed at the sparkling circlet within, with tear-dimmed eyes.

It was one of those unaccountable whims of girlhood that had made her prefer to keep the engagement a secret for a time. The thought of the inevitable comment on every action, every word, every glance, even, had prompted her to the decision. She had never worn the ring in public — even the family had not yet been vouchsafed a sight of it — but she often slipped it on in the privacy of her own room and gloated over its scintillating loveliness. The thought of all it symbolized gave her a touch of tender solemnity that added to her beauty. Now she viewed it with the subdued air of a mourner taking a last lingering look before the coffin lid relentlessly covers all that remains of the loved one.

In the midst of this sad rite her niece burst into the room without any formality in the way of a knock or a request for permission to enter, so eager was she to communicate the wonderful news. Quick as Marjory was, the sharp young eyes caught a flash of light from the object so hastily transferred to her aunt's pocket.

"What's that?" she demanded curiously.

"What?" Marjory was sparring for time.

"That thing you were looking at when I came in."

"Oh! that! Just a — a piece of crystal," she explained hurriedly. "I'll thank you to knock in future," she went on in sharp tones. "I dislike intrusion on my privacy."

Marjy stared at her in hurt amaze. Was this the jolly, lovable, chummy aunt who was always ready to enter into her joys and sorrows, whose room was a beloved retreat? Without a word, but with a great display of injured dignity, the child turned and left the room.

"There! I suppose I've lost her love, too," Marjory thought drearily. "At this rate I'll be reduced to the garden and fuzzy worms before long. I don't see how old maids keep so sweet and kind. I'm beginning to get cranky and nervous already. But they've never been in love as I have, so they can't miss what they've never had. Still, it's some comfort even to have had it!"

With a sigh she started to open the case again, but resolutely resisted the impulse, fearing to test the strength of her self-immolation too severely. Instead she wrapped it with painstaking care in a heavy sheet of dark green glazed paper, and addressed it in clear printed letters.

The note that was to accompany the ring was the result of many unsuccessful attempts. The final wording was simplicity itself, even to the point of callous indifference.

"*My Dear Winthrop:*

"I have been led to see that our engagement is a mistake. Fortunately it is not too late to rectify it. May we not still remain good friends? I am returning the ring.

"Sincerely yours,

"MARJORY CHAMBERLIN."

Putting on a dark veil over her hat to hide her tear-blotched face, she carried her lamb to the altar herself. More than once during the short journey she felt an almost irresistible impulse to turn back, destroy the note, and keep the ring with all it symbolized. Rebellious tears rose in her eyes and a choking sob in her throat. It was her ring, her very own, placed upon her finger by Win himself. Missy had no right to it! It wasn't fair! Oh! it wasn't fair!

Then the reverse side of the medal appeared. Win wanted his freedom. It was plainly evident that he had discovered his mistake but hesitated to ask for release. If Mystery loved him so deeply, he must return her love. This thought summoned pride to her aid. She pushed on resolutely, and almost running into the post-office, thrust her burden into the clerk's hands with undue haste, fearing that her resolve might weaken at the last moment.

"Register the package, please!" she commanded breathlessly. It was the consummation of her sacrifice.

That evening she listened with an aching heart for Winthrop's footsteps. He might come, after all. Perhaps the whole thing was a mistake. Perhaps Mystery loved him for all he had done for her, as a sister might love a devoted brother. She even decided to tell him of the package when he came, and beg his pardon for her lack of trust. She fancied she could hear him assuring her of his unchanging love and devotion. But it proved to be in fancy, only; she listened in vain. In her misery she had

forgotten that Thursday evening was always given up to the bowling club of which he was president. When the great clock in the hall announced eight, then eight-thirty, then nine, and no cheery whistle heralded his approach, she crept up to her room too miserable even to attempt to dissemble before the family.

It was useless to try to sleep with such a weight of bitterness upon her, but she undressed in the dark and went to the half-opened closet for a kimona. Pulling out one of soft blue crêpe she threw it over her night-gown. As she did so something cold touched her breast. Wondering what it could be, she felt along the edge of the garment with careful fingers until she found the cause of the icy touch, and hastily switched on the light to examine it.

It proved to be an oval pin of an old-fashioned pattern. The center was of plain gold, with an intricate monogram engraved upon it. This was surrounded by small spherical stones of some semi-precious crystal. She studied it intently but was unable to decipher the letters. Save for the monogram, there was no identifying mark of any kind. As she deposited her treasure-trove in the jewel box on her dresser, the explanation of its presence there occurred to her. Mrs. Porter had many pieces of old-fashioned jewelry, although she seldom wore them, and this was the very kimona she had sent over for Miss Mystery's use the night after her arrival.

Then another thought struck her. Perhaps the pin belonged to Mystery herself! It might even

afford the clue by which her identity could be discovered and she herself be restored to her people! Fired by the latter thought, she again switched on the light and examined her find with painstaking thoroughness, but nothing further rewarded her search. With a sigh of disappointment she relinquished the new-born hope and replaced the trinket in her jewel box. When she finally went to bed, she tossed restlessly, wakening again and again from an uneasy drowse, the word "Win!" ringing in her ears. Poor child! She was learning for the first time that with woman's heritage, love, comes that other heritage, pain, that ever follows in its train.

The next morning she examined the trinket for the third time, intending to return it at once. It was too important to be neglected. If by any chance it belonged to Miss Mystery herself, it might serve as a link between her darkened past and the present. She realized this fully. But a new mood had taken possession of her over night; the sacrificial impulse had given way to a reckless indifference that was pitifully foreign to her nature.

"It may not be hers at all," she decided finally. "Anyway, it's not my business; I didn't put the pin here, and she's nothing to me. Let Win do the restoring if he wants a perfect wife. Probably he thinks she's perfect enough now!"

With a laugh that was nearer a sneer, she deliberately hid the pin in the deepest recess of one of her trinket boxes, and slamming the drawer with such violence that the whole dresser rattled in pro-

test, she went down to breakfast, humming lightly, in valiant pretense of gayety, the crown of self-immolation so carefully adjusted the night before conspicuous by its absence.

But her mood softened during breakfast, or rather her own straightforward, honorable nature asserted itself. She tried to keep to her resolution; tried to convince herself that "it didn't matter," that it was not her business to return the pin, or even if it was, that she didn't have to hurry about it, but failed ignominiously. Over her grape-fruit she cared not at all; in fact she'd just as soon throw the pin into the scrap-basket. Over her cereal she decided that perhaps she might return it — later; she wasn't at all sure, though. Over her eggs and bacon she knew that it must be sent back immediately.

"Marjy!" she called, as her niece was dancing out of the door. "Wait a moment, dear! I found a pin fastened to that kimona Mrs. Porter borrowed for Miss Mystery, and I want you to take it back. This morning, understand? It may belong —"

"It's Miss Mig's," Marjy interrupted. "I heard her asking Ches to keep watch for it. She thinks she lost it somewhere about the house."

"Oh! Well, that's the one, then. Take it over now, please. Wait! I'll get it for you."

"But I'm awfully late, Marjory," the girl objected. "Can't you —"

"Why, it's not eight-fifteen yet."

"I know, but we're organizing a club — our class, you know — and we're to meet in the gym as early as we can, to elect officers. I want to be there be-

cause —" She stopped, her face flushing in embarrassment.

"I know — because you'd like to be 'it!'" Marjory finished with a ripple of laughter. "'Madam President!' Sounds good, doesn't it? All right, honey: Aunty Mar won't tease you any more. She's as proud as a peacock because her dear little niece is so popular — there! I'll put the pin on your dressing-table and you can hand it in this noon or after school."

"All right; I will. But why don't you take it over yourself this morning?"

"That's my affair," Marjory retorted shortly. "Kindly do as I request. You won't forget, will you?"

"I've given my promise," Marjy replied with a haughtiness that sat strangely upon her young face; "and what I promise, I perform!"

"Whew! Just like that!" her aunt ejaculated under her breath as the girl walked down the path, her whole poise indicative of injured dignity. "She'll be a young lady before we know it! That was straight from the shoulder."

Then she hurried up-stairs, rescued the pin from the depths of oblivion to which she had consigned it, and placed it in a conspicuous place on her niece's dainty blue and white draped dressing-table — a place that Marjy, shooting into womanhood at such a rapid pace, would be sure not to overlook — her little white hand-mirror! Then, with an eased conscience, though her heart was heavy, she set about her day's tasks.

CHAPTER VI

CHESTER COMPLICATES MATTERS

"And many a Knot unravel'd by the Road;
But not the Master-knot of Human Fate."

Winthrop returned from the bowling club somewhat late the previous evening, and overslept the next morning, in consequence. As a result of this indulgence the others had finished breakfast before he appeared: Chester alone still lingered in the dining-room waiting for Katy to poach him another egg. Winthrop attacked his breakfast in a rush, and was just in the midst of this unhygienic process when a shrill whistle, followed closely by a loud peal of the door-bell, announced the morning mail. Chester jumped up to get it.

"You're it, as usual, Win!" he exclaimed, as he tossed two packages towards his brother's plate, deliberately retaining several letters, and scrutinizing the addresses on the dainty envelopes with a mischievous grin. "'Tisn't your birthday or Christmas, but I'll bet those are presents," he went on in a tantalizing monologue. "Must be nice to be a pet. Wish I stood in for extras like you do. The mailman says you got more picture postals and souvenirs from the girls this summer than all the

other fellows in St. George put together. Poor things! guess it hurts 'em to be away where they can't behold your handsome countenance. Say, Win, you'd better break it to 'em gently; they'll have to cut out that sort of thing now, won't they?"

Winthrop had been too preoccupied studying the superscriptions on the packages to pay attention to the boy's nonsense until he caught the last few words.

"That will do for you, Kid!" he warned quietly, and Chester, knowing the better part of valor, or feeling that he had already scored one or two good hits, subsided. Meanwhile Winthrop evidently came to the conclusion that the quickest way to satisfy his curiosity was to remove the wrappings. One of the packages contained a hand-painted shaving-paper holder with the fair artist's initials in one corner. The design appeared to be a convention of cupids, guiltless of clothes, but with their bows and arrows much in evidence. Winthrop glanced at it indifferently, then tossed it towards his brother with a careless: "Here, Kid! You may have this for future reference. Keep mum about it, though. I hope those little devils or angels, or whatever they are, won't give you the jim-jams! Hang it near the register or they'll get pneumonia."

Chester eagerly appropriated the discarded gift: its suggestion of mature manhood appealed to him mightily, quite overshadowing the fantastic uncertainty of its decoration.

"I'll bet a cooky that's a present from Marjory," he hazarded, watching Winthrop with undisguised interest as he toyed with the other package in antic-

ipatory enjoyment. "Only it's too small for slippers; that's the first thing girls send, unless it's a smoking-coat or a dress-shirt protector. Gee! the colors they line 'em with! They're enough to make a fellow seasick!"

"Are you talking still or yet?" his brother inquired with mild sarcasm. "I wasn't aware you'd had such wide experience along that particular line."

"Guess a fellow that ain't blind can see, can't he?" Chester grumbled, "especially if he's got an 'it' brother."

Winthrop laughed good-naturedly. He was in a jovial mood; life was filled with roseate hues, pessimists to the contrary, dyspeptic old grouches, all of them! He whistled Mendelssohn's Wedding March softly as he removed the inner wrapping of white tissue paper.

"Hello! What the deuce—"

Then he remembered that he was not alone and checked himself abruptly. Shoving the small velvet case down into the depths of his trousers' pocket, he opened the letter. In spite of his effort at self-control his face paled as he read the curt communication unsoftened by a word of regret. He stared at it with frowning disbelief for an instant, then rose from the table, leaving his coffee untasted. Striding across the room, he seized his hat and coat from the rack and made an impetuous dash towards the gate, intending to demand an explanation then and there. It was his due; no girl had a right to break an engagement to marry as lightly as she

would break one for the theater or a dance. He had no idea she was that kind of a girl. He wouldn't stand for it!

His lips were set in a hard, straight line as he tramped determinedly down the path and slammed the front gate after him, but before he reached his next door neighbor's he suffered a change of spirit which brought him to an abrupt halt. For a moment he stood still, apparently studying the formation of his own hedge with absorbed interest. Pride had risen up in arms and refused to be downed. Why should he beg Marjory Chamberlin, or any girl, for that matter, to marry him? If she wanted her freedom he certainly wouldn't try to hold her to her promise. No man craves an unwilling wife. That he had given any cause for complaint never occurred to him, nor that she could misinterpret his interest in Miss Mystery. True, his new partnership had made unusual demands upon his time, but it was for her, for the home he meant to make for her. He never begrudged the extra hours.

"Courtland's at the bottom of this, damn him!" he muttered fiercely. An unpleasant sneer curved his set lips as a new thought struck him. "I understand now why she was so anxious to keep the engagement a secret! Wanted to land him first, I suppose! She raved over him from the start, but I never thought she'd go back on a fellow like this. Well, she's welcome! I won't put a straw in the way. In fact I've had a fortunate escape."

The clenched fist with which he emphasized his good fortune came in contact with a corner of the

package that he had shoved into his pocket. He jerked it out and gazed at it as intently as though he had never seen it before. In reality he was seeing the note that had accompanied it. Every word was engraved on his memory; that one reading had fixed its contents indelibly. Nevertheless he glanced about furtively then opened the note and re-read it, with the unacknowledged hope that he might have been mistaken. But there was a finality about its terse sentences that precluded hope. He sneered as he glanced contemptuously from the note to the tiny package.

"I suppose I ought to hand this over to my successful rival — but I won't!"

With an angry gesture he sent the box flying into the hedge and tramped on towards the ferry without one backward glance, so completely beside himself with outraged pride and wounded feeling that the childishness of his action never dawned upon him.

By a rapid sprint he managed to catch his usual boat; the gang-planks were just being hoisted as he sprang on board. Courtland was leaning over the rail at the stern, waiting for him, but he brushed past with a curt "Good morning!" Striding the whole length of the boat he intrenched himself in a secluded corner of the forward deck and spread out his paper. A famous trial was filling the news columns. Its huge black headlines spread from edge to edge of the first page, their sable hue but an inkling of the unsavory details they heralded, but they were neither huge enough or black enough to

obscure the impish antics of a shining circlet that jigged about merrily over the printed sheet. The rays from its sparkling setting fairly scorched his eyes. With an impatient exclamation he put the paper down and stared out over the busy harbor, only to become aware of a new chant of the ferry's screws as she churned her way through the blue-green water: "Engagement — mistake! Engagement — mistake! Engagement — mistake!" The monotonous repetition sickened him.

Courtland was dumbfounded at his friend's curt greeting. They were accustomed to settle themselves in the men's cabin and discuss the events of the day, or smoke together in sociable silence. Sometimes they tramped shoulder to shoulder up and down the deck in the endless procession that daily "walks" across the bay. Finally he came to the conclusion that Winthrop must have had an urgent business appointment with some one on board. With a shrug of acquiescence he strolled into the cabin and settled himself comfortably, not dreaming for an instant, that the rebuff was intentional. Just before the boat drew into its slip at the Battery he hurried forward in search of his friend, eager to talk over the arrangements for the coming play of the Dramatic Club of which he was now a popular member.

Winthrop was sitting hunched up on his camp-stool, his paper propped against the railing before him, but he was not making even a pretense of reading. Instead he was glowering out over the sun-flecked harbor with that intentness of gaze which

sees nothing. Yet it was a sight well worth seeing. Great flocks of gulls were circling swiftly over the water, sending forth flashes of light as the sun struck their white plumage. To the left towered the Statue of Liberty in all her green and bronze beauty, her arm uplifted in glowing guidance to passing mariners. To the right lay Governor's Island. A squad of horsemen was wheeling at a rapid trot over the immense parade ground stolen from old ocean under its very nose. A sentry was marching back and forth before the grim, barred windows of Castle William, whose rounded, vine-glorified walls jealously hid the evil and misery within.

Immediately in front of the ferry-boat lay the Battery, the pointed toe of New York's shoe, all its ceaseless activities in full swing. Beneath its grassy park rumbled the Subway; overhead roared the Elevated; on the surface of its streets clanged the trolleys with an occasional antiquated horse-car of the Belt Line adding a quaint, jingling touch of ancient history to the picture of progressive, metropolitan life. Innumerable motors and trucks, rushing to and fro with resistless force, successfully made life a burden to pedestrians. Craft of all kinds, tiny tugs, huge freighters, ferry-boats and barges, coast-wise steamers and stately full-rigged ships hailing from many ports, were arriving or departing from the docks that edge its water-front: people of many nations were surging over its pavements — sauntering sightseers, scurrying workers and picturesque foreigners freed for the first time from the inquisitive clutches of the Immigration Bureau, and

turned loose, confused or stolid, into the maelstrom of an unfamiliar port's bustling activity. Standing sentinel over it all were the imposing office buildings that give to New York's sky-line its jagged effect, as they rear themselves far above their lowly neighbors, seeming to vaunt: "We go up! up! up! and the end is not yet!" Above them hovered the steam clouds that give the effect of unseasonable snows on their towering tops.

But all this was an old story to Winthrop, to whom the Battery was simply a stretch of territory over which he sprinted daily on his way to his office. Like most New Yorkers he admired it subconsciously, glorying in its cosmopolitanism, but that morning his mind's eye was seeing a far different picture — a glowing girlish face with the dearest of dimples in the rounded chin; flashing dark eyes that could be melting enough as they gazed into his; a curved red mouth's saucy allurement; a slender hand upon which sparkled his sign and seal. He frowned impatiently when Courtland's appearance dissipated the picture, but the latter, unaware that he was intruding upon his friend's holy of holies, pulled up a camp chair and set the conversational ball in motion by asking carelessly: "Did you catch your man?"

A grunt that might be either affirmation or denial answered, but Courtland ascribed his friend's surliness to an unsatisfactory interview and went on manfully. It was up-hill work, however: Winthrop made no pretense of seconding his efforts.

"What's wrong with you, old man?" he de-

manded finally, feeling that their years of friendship gave him certain privileges.

"Of course you don't know!" Winthrop's sneer was evident.

"Right you are, I don't," Courtland replied, with unruffled good-humor. "That Dutch supper last night must have played the deuce with you."

"Dutch supper—" Winthrop started to consign the repast to regions unmentionable, but remembered in time that a crowded ferry-boat has ears as well as eyes.

"Then for Heaven's sake what is the matter? You're as grumpy as an old bear this morning."

"I decline to discuss my affairs with you, either now or at any future time," he replied with icy formality, adding with a growl: "But look here, Courtland! I warn you right here and now, that you'd better keep off my preserves after this. Understand?"

They had left the boat by this time, and were crossing the street. Before Courtland could recover from his consternation, Winthrop strode on and disappeared around the steps leading to the Elevated. His friend stopped short in the middle of the street and stared after him until he was jostled aside by the crowd back of him.

"Indigestion, I suppose," he mused, his good sense enabling him to rise above the surly insult. "Poor chap! he's all in, this morning. But I'll have to find out the exact location of those preserves of his, I see, unless I want trouble. I placed them pretty close to the Porter home-site, and I've religiously avoided the

locality ever since, even though I found it pretty attractive. I've been mistaken, evidently. Since my restraint was not appreciated, I'll go where I please in future, and Win can go to the devil for all I care!" Which decision showed that Mr. Arthur Courtland, in spite of his easy-going good-nature, could not be trodden upon with impunity, even by his best friend, Mr. Winthrop Porter.

Meanwhile his satanic majesty found work for Chester's idle hands. The boy had watched his brother's movements with suppressed curiosity. When Winthrop left the house in such mad haste, slamming the front door with unnecessary violence, he gave vent to a shrill whistle.

"Whew! And he didn't even kiss mother! Wonder what's up!"

He stepped to the window expecting to see him stop in front of the Chamberlin's as usual, or at least whistle the customary signal and wave a hurried greeting to his lady-love as he dashed past. Instead he was just in time to witness the fate of the package. Boy-like, he never stopped to discuss the ethics of the case, but with an excited: "Me for that!" he marked the spot in his mind's eye with unerring accuracy. Raising the window with a bang that made its old-fashioned square panes quiver, he vaulted over the sill and did a double quick across the lawn. Then began a vigorous search for the mysterious missile. In spite of the fact that he had located pretty definitely the section of hedge into or near which it must have fallen, it was no easy task to discover the exact spot. Winthrop's furious wrath had

lent forcefulness to his arm, and this, with the dark green wrapper on the parcel, complicated matters considerably. But he persevered, and finally success perched on his banner; he discovered the flouted package deeply imbedded in the very heart of the hedge.

"Gee whilliken! What a beauty!" he exclaimed, as he prudently crouched down in the shelter of a clump of bushes and proceeded to examine his find. "Marjory must have gotten huffy and sent it flying back. Ain't girls silly, though! It's a regular 'wandering jew — el'!" He chuckled in keen appreciation of his joke. "And to think that it might have stayed here forever if I hadn't been 'Johnny-on-the-spot'! Win's the limit! He must think money grows on trees! The idea! planting a diamond ring in the hedge!"

The boy was shrewd enough to understand that his brother wished the affair kept a secret since he had not taken even his mother into his confidence, and he was thoughtful enough to respect his wishes. He racked his brain in an effort to find a suitable cage for his white elephant. After mentally canvassing various hiding-places, not one of which seemed immune from the clearing-out germ that frequently afflicted his mother's system, he decided to turn it over to Marjy for safe-keeping, but a second thought convinced him that this would not be a wise plan.

"Too near Marjory," he decided. "Besides, girls are no good at keeping secrets. They don't give 'em away purposely — at least the nice girls like Marjy wouldn't — but they hint and go about grin-

ning at nothing, so it's just as bad. Anyhow, Win wouldn't want a little kid like that to know all his business and neither would Marjory."

The possibility that both Win and Marjory might resent his own interference never entered his mind. To him his course seemed obvious. No one short of an angel — and St. George had no angelic samples by which to judge — would have acted otherwise. A mysterious package in the hedge would prove too powerful a magnet for any sane human being to resist. It never occurred to Chester even to try. As for leaving it where he found it — only an idiot would think of that. Certainly Chester never for an instant contemplated such a course.

After much anxious thought and careful weighing of various pros and cons, he determined to entrust his treasure-trove to Miss Mystery. That she was a girl not many years older than Marjy, whose secret-keeping powers he held in such poor esteem, never occurred to him. He knew instinctively that he could depend upon her. Nevertheless he decided not to take her into his confidence — that would hardly be fair to Winthrop and Marjory — but simply to ask her to keep the package for him, stipulating that no one be allowed to see it.

Fortunately she was in her own room when he reentered the house, the package elaborately hidden in the folds of his handkerchief, and that in turn crammed into the depths of his trousers' pocket. Before handing over his find, he made a lame explanation that failed to explain, but managed to impress upon Miss Mystery the fact that the whole ar-

rangement must be a confidential one. She surmised, from his embarrassment, that it was some gift he had purchased to present to Marjy.

"Remember, now!" he warned emphatically; "nobody must know a thing about it, not even mother. It's a — a sort of a — a present, you know, but she — I — I don't want to give it yet awhile. Just keep it safe until I ask for it, will you?"

"I will," she promised, and strange to say they were both so engrossed in the secret that neither noticed the perfect ease with which she replied.

He waited until she slipped the package into the depths of a box of collars and belts in her top dresser drawer.

"Sure no one'll see it there?" he insisted.

Mystery nodded, and he departed, satisfied, to await developments.

Evidently the day brought wise counsel in one respect, for Winthrop returned just at dusk, at least two boats earlier than was his custom, with a fixed purpose in mind. Usually he strode along the avenue as though possessed of the seven-leagued boots, but on that particular occasion he walked the length of the hedge several times at a snail's pace, keenly scrutinizing each break in its still leafy surface, and stooping more than once to run his hand along the ground beneath it. Unfortunately the one person who held the key to his erratic behavior was at that moment engaged in a strenuous game of basketball in the school gymnasium, while the object of his search was lying in Miss Mystery's top drawer, con-

cealed beneath several layers of collars and belts, so he finally relinquished his fruitless efforts and stalked morosely into the house with the pleasing assurance in his own mind that he had made "all kinds of a fool" of himself!

Affairs in the suburb went on in unruffled serenity in spite of the fact that two of the most popular people in the younger set had agreed to disagree. There had been no public engagement so there could be no public rupture, but in St. George as everywhere else, there were gossips who shrewdly surmised that things were not as they should be. Nor were their surmises kept to themselves. The fact that Marjory was seen more than once with Courtland as her escort, after all the years in which Winthrop had officiated in that capacity, was enough to arouse suspicion, and when that young gentleman himself began to appear with Miss Mystery, surmise among these knowing ones became certainty. But the gossips gleaned nothing from the principals. Marjory was gayety personified: life to her seemed a sunshiny affair enough. It was not granted to them to behold her with the mask off. They knew nothing of long, sleepless hours when her mind went over and over each detail of her life's disaster until it seemed that she must give in to overmastering circumstances; must let herself go and moan aloud in her hurt agony.

As far as the two men were concerned, they avoided each other whenever possible, but were scrupulously polite when forced to meet in affairs social; yet in spite of this mutual self-restraint the

temperature in their immediate vicinity lowered appreciably while they remained near each other. In Winthrop's eyes Courtland was a "cad" who had deliberately "cut him out"! As for Courtland, the poor fellow was completely at sea, but he bided his time, hoping for some reasonable explanation of his friend's attitude. His was an equable nature not given to unnecessary tilting.

"I think it shows mighty poor taste on Winthrop's part," Mrs. Thorne declared forcefully. "The idea! Jilting a splendid girl like Marjory Chamberlin for a baby-faced idiot like that!"

"Sh! Sh!" several shocked voices remonstrated warningly.

"Well, that's just what she is, isn't it?"

"But they say she talks now as well as anybody," one of the listeners vouchsafed, her tone a mingling of belief and disbelief. "And Marjory doesn't act as though she were jilted. I should think any girl would be satisfied to get a man like Mr. Courtland — a gentleman, with plenty of money, and so big and handsome!"

The speaker was a confirmed old maid, but there was a thrill of youthful romance in her voice that would have done credit to twenty summers.

"I don't think Miss Mystery's an idiot. I never did think so," another volunteered, emboldened by the first speaker's courageous frankness. "She'll probably be hazy in her memories —"

"Hazy!" interpolated Mrs. Thorne. "Yes, she will be hazy! You'll find that even now she won't remember who she is nor where she came from be-

cause —" she lowered her voice to a dramatic whisper —" she don't dare! She'll remain 'Miss Mystery' to the end of the chapter."

In more friendly circles the improvement in the interesting young stranger was also a frequent topic of conversation, but these people spoke of it with heartfelt congratulation, rejoicing in the lightening of the girl's terrible affliction.

And there was reason for rejoicing; that first murmured word evidently loosed the flood-gates of speech. For a few days the girl talked in a hesitating, uncertain manner, with lengthy intervals of thought between, as though she were feeling her way on a long unused path. But gradually she grew more confident, and as she gained command of herself, the pauses in her speech were of less frequent occurrence. Before two weeks had passed she was talking fluently, voice and accent, even her choice of words after that first groping was over, proclaiming not only education but culture.

With the ability to speak came the ability to write. But alas! memory, the elusive, still lay dormant, awaiting some quickening touch as yet unapplied. As the girl performed little household tasks or attempted various sports and games, she realized that it was not the first time she had done those things, but under what conditions they had been performed she could not recall. Yet in spite of this flaw in her recovery, the doctor was openly jubilant over her progress, and went about "I-told-you-so-ing!" like an exulting youngster.

"Tricky thing, this gray matter of ours!" he ex-

plained to the family. "It's like a supersensitive child; if it's insulted or abused, it simply takes its doll rags and refuses to go on with the game. Just how our little lady offended hers I don't know, previous to that gentle tap of the brick, I mean; that alone was enough to make any brain 'mad,' as the children say, and I don't blame it a bit. But I think there had been earlier irritation as well. In fact I'm surprised that it didn't go out of business altogether. Well, I must be off. Don't try to push her too far, good people. Your curiosity will either be satisfied some day or — it won't! A word with you, Mrs. Porter, please!" he ended, as he stalked into the hall.

She followed obediently.

"If we could only establish some link with her past life!" he exclaimed, striking the palm of one hand with the clenched fist of the other in evident irritation. "Then everything might become plain to her. Are you sure there was nothing about her clothes, or in that little traveling bag of hers, that could serve this purpose? Think a minute!"

"I've tried her on everything she had when she came to us," Mrs. Porter replied positively. "You see all her things were brand new so they have no associations whatever."

"Too bad! Too bad! If we only had the ubiquitious locket or picture dear to the heart of the melodramatist! But never mind! We have enough to be thankful for! The rest will come — maybe! And that reminds me — I heard one of the neighbors say that Missy has decided to study

kindergarten work, or something of that sort. Has she?"

"Why, yes, she wants to do something. She says she can't live in dependence, now that she's well and strong. I've argued and argued, but she won't give up her plan."

"Why do you want her to give it up?" he demanded bluntly.

"It's a selfish reason, I'm afraid; I'll miss her so. Why, doctor, I never imagined before what it means to have a daughter! You know what my boys are — every one does — just the best boys in the whole world — but a daughter! You don't know what a sweet disposition she has, yet she can be spunky, too; the boys have found that out already! It seems as though I can't give her up, even for a part of each day." She wiped her eyes furtively, then coughed with evident effort, remarking ingenuously: "I always seem to catch cold at this season of the year in spite of all I can do. She is such a dear," she added, reverting to her original topic. "You don't know what a difference she makes in the house."

"Perhaps I can guess," he remarked dryly. "And see here! If she persists in her intention, let her go ahead: I don't think it will hurt her now. In fact it will do her good. But in regard to — er — you know — clothes and — and pocket money — I — I thought —" he cleared his throat several times, then make a determined effort and blurted out what he had to say, although his face turned to the fiery hue of an embarrassed schoolboy. "I want to supply the sinews of war."

"But it isn't necessary. I —"

"I know you're more than willing. You've been an angel to that poor child, an angel! Yes, sir, an angel!" He spoke with great warmth.

"A well disguised angel, doctor," she amended with a hearty laugh, as she glanced significantly at her own portly, unromantic figure. "I don't believe the popular conception is either stout or gray-haired, is it?"

"Angel or no angel, you've done more than your share; now it's my turn. This is just between you and me, remember! Of course she's a case to me, just a case, and I wouldn't have Mig — anybody know for a thousand dollars," he corrected hastily. After another throat-clearing he went on in disjointed explanation: "People are just fool enough to — That's the worst of being a bachelor! In a suburb like this everybody knows everybody else's business, or they think they do. And what they don't know they imagine! Even an old duffer like I am isn't free from — Well, it's none of their business even if — You're sensible! You understand!"

She did — more than he intended she should.

"Of course I do," she assured him gravely; "but you've done enough."

"Humph! this case was pure good fortune for me professionally. Wouldn't have missed studying it for a mint of money — special features, you know; can't get cases like this made to order, let me tell you. And I'm still on it, understand. I don't intend to give up until she's corralled that con-

founded memory of hers if it takes ten years! Not that I personally care a hang who she was or what she was; what she is is enough for me. Here!" he pushed something forcibly into her hand. "This is the first installment. You know the little fripperies girls like to have better than I do. We're in partnership in this matter. Remember, it's just between you and me and the gate-post!"

"But I'm afraid it isn't fair — to her," Mrs. Porter objected weakly. "She may not feel as you do; I mean she may not be willing to accept —"

"She can't object when she knows nothing about it," he retorted, and before she could remonstrate further he stalked out to his waiting motor with a curt good-by.

Mrs. Porter was so busy smoothing out the little wad he had thrust into her hand that she left him unanswered.

"A hundred-dollar bill!" she exclaimed, staring at it incredulously. "Poor fellow! I'm afraid he isn't in it!"

Just what she meant by that cryptic utterance, or by the anxious sigh that followed, she did not explain. Fate seemed to be giving an unexpected twist to affairs just then, one that was beyond her powers to straighten.

When she broached the subject of winter clothes to Mystery, she met with decided opposition.

"I've accepted too much already," the girl protested. "Why, Mother Porter, I don't think there's another woman in the whole world who would do what you have done. And for a total stranger, too!

I'd have been sent off to a hospital that first afternoon, and I'd have stayed a — a clod! It's only because I've been with you, and have had such loving care that I've recovered my senses. Oh! I can't express my gratitude; it's too deep, but I hope and pray that some day I may be able to repay you, even a little part of it all."

"You have repaid me, dearie." Mrs. Porter put her arms around the slender little figure that yet had nothing angular about it, and lifted the sweet face to her own. "You are repaying me every day, Missy, by being a loving companion, a real daughter to me. My boys are — just boys, and Mig — well, she's not exactly exuberant in her affections, is she? I confess, I sometimes wish she were. I know you won't misunderstand me, child; you and she are such firm friends. She loves you dearly. She'd do anything in the world for me and mine, too, and as for Win, she fairly worships the ground he treads on. But she does it all in her own peculiar way, and it's not an affectionate way, as you know. Don't you see that I've been just a little starved in my home-life? Boys are not demonstrative, even though they may be loving enough. Don't deny me this pleasure, dear!"

"But you can't afford to spend money on me," Mystery persisted. "Just the other day you spoke about needing new table linen. Time enough to buy my things after I get a position."

"You need clothes now," Mrs. Porter insisted gently. "Let me manage this, dear! Surely you can trust me."

"But I don't see where the money is coming from!"

"I do, so it's all right." Mrs. Porter chuckled in spite of herself as she remembered its embarrassed donor.

"But you'll let me pay it back when I get to work, won't you, the money part, I mean? I never, never can pay back the rest. I never want to; it's too precious a burden."

In spite of her misgivings, the next few weeks were exciting ones to Mystery. Her "trousseau" as Win teasingly called it, was not extensive, but it was carefully chosen and dainty enough to bring joy to any girl's heart. The family were enthusiastic in their admiration, while even Miss Miller, the suburban dressmaker, grudgingly admitted that "she knew her own style," which, from Miss Miller, was quite an admission.

As the weeks went by Mrs. Thorne's attitude towards Miss Mystery, instead of moderating, became more and more aggressive; she seemed to resent her very presence in the suburb. Through it all she took the lofty stand of maternal responsibility; her daughter must not be contaminated by this stranger who might prove to be—"anything!" This terrible accusation was always made in a stage whisper which thrilled her listeners with its dreadful possibilities. Perhaps the newcomer's growing beauty and popularity among the young people added rancor to her comments. Bessie Thorne was too decidedly a chip of the old block to be popular, in spite of the family's venerable age and generous hospitality, and

no one could accuse her of exerting the allurements of a beauty.

As usual the conscientious friend who felt it her "duty" to retail these caustic comments was not lacking. Naturally such persistent animosity troubled Mrs. Porter somewhat, but several things occurred at this time to take out the sting. More than one member of the W. P. C. either wrote or called with urgent offers of help towards the stranger's wardrobe and expenses. Like the doctor's, each offer was made in strict confidence. Mrs. Porter refused them all, yet it warmed her heart, nevertheless, to know that these busy women, with a multiplicity of demands upon their not over-full purses, should be anxious to help in a case of this kind which would reflect neither honor nor glory upon them. The W. P. C. was living up to its name, and its left hand was not well informed as to its right hand's business, either!

"There's not as much clabber in human nature as the pessimists would have us believe," she informed Aunt Mig triumphantly. "And club women seem to have their hearts in the right place after all, in spite of the masculine opinion to the contrary."

In refusing these kindly offers she began to regret that she had not refused the doctor's, also. She had an uneasy feeling that its acceptance placed Mystery in a false position. Still, the girl needed clothes and needed them immediately, and she herself had no hundred-dollar bills to spend. She comforted herself with the reflection that the doctor was past forty, old enough to be Mystery's father. And

besides, as he himself said, the case had been of inestimable value to him, and Mystery need never know that he was her benefactor. So she rapped her uneasy conscience smartly and ordered it to behave and keep quiet!

Marjory resolutely kept away from the house after the break between herself and Winthrop. Dearly as she loved Mrs. Porter, pride would not permit her to visit his home lest it might seem that she was seeking a renewal of the severed tie. Yet with all a woman's inconsistency she hoped against hope that Winthrop would protest against her decision; would urge her to reconsider. But no word came from him. The finality of her letter and the interpretation his wounded feelings read into it, kept him from making any effort to hold her to her promise. He loved her devotedly, but what man wants an unloving wife? If Courtland had won her away from him, that was his loss; at all events he had no intention of wearing his heart on his sleeve for St. George gossips to peck at.

Such was his state of mind when he and Marjory met face to face for the first time, at the end of the week. As he raised his hat formally and passed on, Marjory's unacknowledged hope died a sudden death. After that he was always in a terrific rush when passing the Chamberlin's, and whenever he encountered Marjory at any of the suburban merry-makings he greeted her with smiling indifference. Unconsciously he threw into his manner towards Mystery, whom he had begun to take about, a devotedness of attention that certainly looked lover-

like to the casual observer; to Marjory it seemed proof positive that he was rejoicing in his regained liberty.

"Suppose I had never heard that first word she spoke!" she thought in an agony of heart-racking self-communion. "It would be terrible to be engaged to a man who was in love with another girl, but oh! I do love him! I can't conquer it!"

Mrs. Porter missed her bright young neighbor sadly, in spite of having her protégée's company. She knew that things had gone wrong and felt genuinely regretful, but like the wise mother she was, she heroically refrained from "nagging" at Winthrop. But one petition was added nightly to her simple prayer: "Help them to find each other again if it is Thy will."

As the weeks went by and Marjory failed to run over in the old intimate way, she sent for her more than once to consult with her in regard to Mystery's plans, not dreaming for an instant that she was turning the screw in an open wound. Marjory always responded to these summons and lent herself unreservedly to the project in hand; she too objected to hearts as sleeve decorations!

Matters were in this unsettled state one day when Mrs. Porter called up and gave Marjory a cordial invitation to come over for lunch.

"Mystery is going to town on an errand for me, and Aunt Mig and Chester are both taking lunch at school," she urged, "so if you have no previous engagement, dear, it will be a good chance for a nice cozy chat. We haven't had one for a long

time. I've missed my dark-eyed neighbor-lassie. Come over, dear, and cheer me up."

Marjory realized that the good lady was trying to show that her love for one girl had not changed her feeling towards the other. She appreciated this, and also the motherly restraint that made Mrs. Porter refrain from any reference to changed conditions. Some women would have probed into the affair as their right, pitying while they probed; and pity would have hurt more than it helped, even from her. Marjory knew that Winthrop had no secrets from his mother, as that lady had once proudly boasted, so he must have told her that it was she who had broken the engagement. This thought might not have been so soothing to her pride had she known that the keen, motherly eyes pierced through her armor of gay indifference and beheld the unconquered love and longing beneath.

When Katy learned that Miss Marjory was expected, she put in what Chester called "her best licks." As a result several well-known favorites of Marjory's graced the menu: flaky home-made biscuit and crabapple jelly, delicately browned cheese fondu in dainty individual casseroles, and the toothsome, troublesome potato puffs of which the young guest was inordinately fond. Katy regretted, volubly, that there was no time to fix "open-faced" sandwiches, also. For the first time in weeks Marjory's errant appetite returned, and to the delight of the zealous maid hovering watchfully near, she did full justice to her culinary efforts.

The two women chatted lightly during lunch

time. They had many topics of interest in common; the W. P. C. work, affairs in their church, and the happenings, grave and gay, in the immediate neighborhood. Yet once or twice, in spite of mutual wariness, they skated on thin ice.

The older woman noted the dark circles beneath the girl's eyes with a throb of pity. She longed to put in an oar and try to steer the drifting ship of her happiness into safe harbor, but feared the fate that usually befalls those who meddle with the little god's affairs. At first she had accepted Winthrop's short, sharp explanation of the trouble, and had wrathfully referred to the unconscious Courtland whom, up to that time, she had always liked, as "that man!" She had felt resentful towards Marjory, too, fond as she had always been of her, and was glad that she kept away. But soon her opinion veered about. She was convinced that Winthrop was mistaken, at least as far as Marjory was concerned. It was patent to eyes not blinded by unreasoning jealousy, that Miss Chamberlin, in the part of a heartless jilt, was a failure. Neither was her appearance that of a girl happily engaged to the man of her choice. But that Miss Mystery was in any way associated with the break never once occurred to her. She and Winthrop were the best of friends, as his mother had observed more than once, with keen satisfaction, but their friendship, to her eyes, was written in fraternal, rather than lover-like terms.

As they left the table, Mrs. Porter remembered her fancy work, and proudly displayed for Marjory's

delectation a blouse of soft creamy batiste with insets of Cluny lace.

"It's to be a surprise for Missy. I don't want to get the neck too tight. Will you run up to her room, Marjory, and bring me down one of her collars? Stairs don't appeal to me of late; that's the penalty a woman pays for increasing avoirdupois."

Marjory started on her errand but paused to ask: "Any special one?"

"No! Any one will do. If there's none on the dresser, look in the large yellow box in her top drawer. And hurry, dear! She may get home any minute. I'll keep her here if she comes before you find it."

Seeing no collar of any kind on the dresser, Marjory followed Mrs. Porter's directions and pulled open the upper drawer. In the top of the box she sought lay a number of belts and a ribbon or two, but beneath them protruded the end of an Irish crochet stock. Sweeping the other things lightly aside to secure it, she exposed to view a small package wrapped in dark green glazed paper. Tiny though it was, it flaunted itself mockingly before her eyes. Instinctively she made a motion to seize it, but memory asserted itself; she restrained the impulse, and with an inarticulate murmur, stood gazing down upon it with quivering lips and tear-filled eyes, so engrossed that she failed to hear the light step that sounded behind her. She started in dismay when Mystery herself stood beside her.

"I — I'm hunting for a — for something Mrs. Porter wants," she murmured in hurried explana-

tion, realizing that to the unprejudiced observer her action must look like prying.

Mystery's face flushed with embarrassment. She hurriedly covered the package and closed the drawer.

"That's not necessary," Marjory reminded her coldly. "I've already seen it."

"I'm so sorry!" Her voice was full of genuine regret. "He asked me — I promised —"

"You needn't be afraid, nor he either," Marjory assured her loftily. "It is of no possible interest to me, you know. I won't speak of it to any one. Did he ask you not to —"

"He asked me not to show it to any one until he gave me leave, and I promised I wouldn't. He'll think I'm not to be trusted now. He's such a manly fellow I knew it must be all right, or he wouldn't even ask me."

Chester's heart would have been gladdened by such unreserved praise from Miss Mystery, whom he admired with boyish fervor, but to Marjory's distorted vision it was Winthrop of whom she spoke and her words fairly reeked of possession. She resented it fiercely even while contemptuously branding herself a dog in the manger. With a mighty effort she finally conquered her resentment:

"Did Mother Porter tell you that she sent me up after a collar?" she asked coldly. Then, remembering the surprise, she added in lame explanation: "I think it needs mending or — or something."

"Oh, yes — my lace one! But she needn't bother about it: I can mend it. No, I haven't seen her yet; I came in through the side door because I wanted to

hide this. Look! Isn't it pretty? I got it to surprise her."

She proudly displayed a jabot of soft écru lace with some embroidery and French knots done in black silk. Marjory dutifully admired it, but her heart was aching. Bitter, rebellious thoughts were searing her very soul.

"He might have waited a decent length of time before giving my ring to another girl, but I suppose he's afraid he'll lose her. At any rate, he hasn't taken any chances."

With that instinct towards self-torture which besets devotées whose way leads to Love's shrine through paths not all rose-strewn — the price they pay for admission to the coveted region — she deliberately appraised her rival's charms, appraised them fairly, too; the great blue eyes with their wondrous length of dark curling lashes, the sweet mouth and the firm little chin, the flushed, dimpled cheeks, the masses of short golden curls and the slender rounded figure, all forming a picture of bewitching girlhood.

Her eyes filled with tears as she turned to leave the room, but Mystery detained her.

"Please don't blame me, Marjory," she pleaded softly; "for hiding the package, I mean. I think he wants to wait awhile —"

"Why should I blame you, pray?"

"I couldn't refuse when he asked me — I love him dearly; but I promised faithfully not to let any one see it, so I —"

"No apology is necessary," Marjory interrupted

airily. "Of course you'll keep it; he asked you to."

Then the remembrance that she had not kept it when he asked her, cut through her heart like a knife; but a wave of slighted love surged over it.

"He thought he wanted me to have it," she mused resentfully; "but he found out his mistake quite promptly."

CHAPTER VII

WHAT'S IN A NAME

"And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd!"

Misfortunes never come singly, as every one knows, but in Chester Porter's case it happened to be good fortune that came with an accompaniment. The boy had no idea, when he joined the rest of the family at the supper table, a few evenings later, that he was to be the recipient of a shower of favors. It almost took his breath away when he learned the full extent of his good fortune: almost, for Chester Porter, speechless — in the bosom of the family, that is — was a phenomenon beyond the Porter imagination! Thanks to Katy's timely warning, earlier in the day, it was not as late as usual when he hurried into the kitchen that evening.

"You better not eat no more of them apples," she had cautioned good-naturedly, when he came in for the third installment. "We're goin' to have something you like fer supper."

"What? Oysters?"

"No — chicken an' stuffin'!"

"Goody!" With a fortitude born of reward to come he had tossed the apples back into the basket. Roast chicken was a treat, of late, with poultry sell-

ing at prohibitive prices. Chester was inordinately fond of it, but unfortunately his enthusiasm was shared by the rest of the family, so he realized that it behooved him to be on time for once. He knew, too, that with all his virtues, Winthrop was not infallible as a carver. There had even been times when some one not present at the original count had been left out of his calculations altogether, at least as far as choice cuts were concerned. This knowledge alone, to say nothing of the delicious odor that greeted him as he entered the kitchen, was enough to induce haste in any hungry boy of sixteen, especially after covering miles of road in a strenuous game of "Cops and Robbers." He was dashing towards the dining-room door as he demanded anxiously: "Supper on?" but Katy's voice restrained him:

"Better wash yer hands, Ches! Yer ant'll take a fit if she sees them dirty paws. You know her motto."

"Aw, shucks! It don't take much to send Aunt Mig into spasms. I guess cleanliness is next to godliness, all right, but roast chicken's got 'em both beaten to a frazzle! When it's in the race they get left at the post! We don't have chicken often, now that it's up in 'G,' so I've got to be 'Johnny-on-the spot!' Aunt Mig makes me tired!"

But his grumbling obligato was an accompaniment to a hurried hand-cleansing, nevertheless, if holding the members in question under one of the sink faucets for an instant, then wiping them upon the long towel, could be called a cleansing process. It spoke volumes for Katy's good-nature that the

black imprints upon her snowy roller called forth no word of reproof. But then Katy seldom "went up in the air" over trifles.

Chester took his seat at the table by tipping his chair and swinging into it over the high back, a performance peculiarly irritating to his aunt, as he well knew, but he was too interested in Winthrop's monœuvers with the carving-knife and steel to care. He longed for the office of carver with boyish fervor, breaking the tenth commandment every time he watched his brother's performance. Katy had discovered him more than once intent upon "The Proper Way to Carve" in her big cook book. But finally even in the midst of his absorption, he became conscious of intent eyes fixed upon him. Instinctively his hand shot to his mouth and back again, warily depositing the forgotten wad of chewing-gum on the under side of the table among a flourishing colony of brother wads. Then, remembering his hurried ablutions, he took the further precaution of keeping his hands out of the front of the picture until the vigilant gaze should be shifted to other quarters.

Aunt Mig's eyes were fixed upon him, but for once her glance was neither exploratory nor accusatory: it was mildly speculative. After a moment, during which the lad writhed in uncertainty, the result of her mental processes was launched into the family conversation without any formality of waiting for a pause. But then Aunt Mig was always sure of her audience. She had a compelling way of booming forth her utterances like the harbor fog-horn; the Porters knew by experience that they

would be repeated at regular intervals, until they gained recognition.

In her school work Aunt Mig had adopted as her motto: Repetition is the teacher's sheet anchor. She firmly believed in its soundness of doctrine. If her remark were simply: "I think it is going to rain," she would unhurriedly announce the result of her thought processes at fog-horn intervals, with no change of either diction or accent, until her listeners also thought it was going to rain, or at least said they did. Aunt Mig's hammering policy was bound to succeed.

"I'm not going to use them, Chester, so you might as well have them."

Chester was taken by surprise at this unexpectedly mild ending to her fixed stare; usually it meant "ructions!" For a moment he failed to reply.

"I'm not going to use them, Chester, so you might as well have them," she repeated calmly.

"Have what, Aunt Mig?" the boy asked with frowning curiosity, once more venturing to use his hands openly and aboveboard.

"My tickets."

"Tickets? What tickets?"

"For the show at the Lyceum, to-night. The Auction Club meets here and your mother needs me to make up a table. Do you want them?"

"Do I want 'em! Sure I do! Gee whiz! You're a brick, Aunt Mig! They say it's going to be a jim-dandy show. And there's the dance afterwards, too. I should say I do want 'em!"

"Look here, Kid!" Winthrop addressed his

young brother with a benign expression on his manly features. "I think I'll give them to you, after all."

"What?" Chester demanded breathlessly. "More tickets?"

"No, my dress clothes."

The boy stared at his brother incredulously. Was he dreaming or had he really heard aright?

"My new ones came out to-day," Winthrop went on carelessly. "The others are pretty shabby, but they'll do for you, won't they?"

"You bet!" was the brief but enthusiastic reply. "Gee! won't the fellows sit up and take notice, though! Lots of 'em have glad rags, but they're just sawed-offs! Tuxedos can't hold a candle to tails!"

"But I'm afraid he's too young, Winthrop," Mrs. Porter objected in a hesitating way, disliking to put a damper upon the boy's pleasure, but feeling that the gift was hardly suitable. "Plenty of time for evening clothes by and by, dear. They'll keep."

"I think he's entirely too young," Aunt Mig declared with decision.

"But he's large for his age," Mystery pleaded eagerly, seeing how much the boy's heart was set upon wearing the clothes right away, "and as long as Win can't use them I should think Ches might have them."

In return for her championship she received a "Good for you, Mys! You're all right!"

"I think he's entirely too young," Aunt Mig was beginning again, when Winthrop took up the gage

in defense of his brother. Where he led, Aunt Mig, like Mary's little lamb, was "sure to follow"; before another five minutes elapsed she would have been strenuously advocating the very cause upon which she had previously frowned, so Mrs. Porter forebore to press her objection further. Perhaps the boy's evident delight in his unexpected gift silenced her.

By this time the chicken had retired to third place in Chester's estimation, and the usual "Oliver Twist" request was unaccompanied by the inevitable grumbling obligato: "No use savin' so much for Katy. She don't care for chicken. She c'n get lots at her father's farm. Can't I just have one more piece of white meat or a bone to pick? I'm awfully hungry."

He asked for more as a matter of habit, or possibly to spare his family a shock, but he really did not want it, and he did not even wait for dessert, although it proved to be coffee jelly and whipped cream. All he cared for was to get into those wonderful clothes as quickly as possible.

In the hall he paused thoughtfully before the telephone, uncertain whether to ring up and invite Marjy right away, or wait and give the invitation in person. It was a momentous question and called for earnest consideration. Finally he decided to surprise her. He could go early and have the pleasure of witnessing her elation. It didn't take girls long to get ready: it wasn't as if they had to put on evening clothes. And he knew that she did not expect to go to the show because she had said so that

afternoon. At the Chamberlin's as at the Porter's, tickets for suburban treats were usually apportioned in the order of age: youth was a distinct disadvantage.

It was a strong temptation to give his invitation then and there, but he clung to his original decision, and was turning away from the telephone when a brilliant inspiration came to him. He hesitated an instant before acting upon it, but finally, with head thrown back defiantly, and a "do or die" expression upon his freckled, boyish face, he carefully closed the door leading to the dining-room, jerked off the receiver, and in subdued tones demanded the number he wanted. The ensuing conversation was carried on, on his part, in a loud whisper.

"Hello! Mr. Finley? . . . This is Chester Porter. You remember when that horse of yours was shinnying down Bay Street to-day and I stopped it and you said you'd make it all right with me? Say, can't I have a carriage for to-night, for the show at the Lyceum? I — I'm takin' a lady, an' . . . Oh, no! just for going! We'd as soon walk home as not. We'd rather! . . . Thank you, sir. I'll keep an eye on your horses whenever they get frisky. You c'n depend on me. . . . Yes, sir. I don't mind going early. Send it around to the house at seven-thirty sharp, then. Good — hey there! Mr. Finley! Wait a minute! Send it to the Chamberlin's instead of here, will you? I — I think that'll be better. Did you mark it on the slate? You might forget. . . . All right! And say, Mr. Finley, you won't send an old rattle-trap,

will you? That new coupé'll do, if it ain't engaged. . . . All right! Thanks! Good-by!"

Then with a whoop of joy that was an irrepressible expression of the effervescence within, he jumped up the stairs two at a time, dashed into Aunt Mig's room, and appropriated the tickets which a disastrously hurried search revealed in the drawer of her dressing-table.

"Lest we forget!" he quoted grimly, for Aunt Mig, in spite of her lofty sentiments had more than once displayed lax ideas on the subject of meum and tuum. She had swelled the ranks of Indian givers more than once, adding insult to injury as she did so by assuring the visitor in her positive way: "Oh, no! Take them by all means! Chester won't mind in the least, will you, Chester? You'd like Mrs. Horton to use the tickets, wouldn't you?" And Chester was expected to smirk and reply: "Yes, ma'am!" in that meek self-effacement that falls to the lot of half-grown lads, while a fire of seething revolt burned in his heart.

But not this time! No, sir! Too much depended upon the triple alliance he had been fortunate enough to effect: evening clothes, carriage and tickets. It was no joke to be the youngest in a family and have several clean-finger-nail, collar-criticizing, tie-straightening, pure-speech enthusiasts always on the war-path! This time he proposed to take no chances.

With the tickets off his mind and on his chiffonier, Chester hurried into Winthrop's room after his clothes. The new suit was spread out on the bed

in all its glossy glory, but it did not appeal to him as did the old one, shabby though it undoubtedly was: that was his, his very own, his first adventure into real manhood! He lifted the garments from their hanger with almost reverent care and carried them to his own room.

The dressing-fest that followed was a period of pure joy in spite of drawbacks that might have daunted a less determined nature. His new trousers had to be girded uncomfortably high, and he shivered as he realized the responsibility vested in the huge safety-pin that joined blouse and trousers' band a scant half-inch below the low-cut vest, its duty not to keep the trousers up as to keep them down. His footwear also presented difficulties. As ill-luck would have it, his black shoes had reached the reconstruction period. His sneakers were black, but their rubber soles precluded participation in the dance that was to follow the play, and he did not propose to forego any part of his evening's dissipation, yet even his optimism viewed his tan ties doubtfully.

"They look like the last rose of summer," he muttered. "Guess they're called in by this time."

Finally he solved the difficulty by plastering them with a generous coat of blacking. The streaky result of his labors lowered his spirits for an instant, but joy over his treble good fortune soon restored them to high pitch again: his exaltation lifted him above petty annoyances. They wouldn't show much at night; it would be different if it were daytime.

Who says that clothes don't make the man? As

he surveyed himself proudly in his chiffonier glass, Chester Porter knew that they do! He was not half bad-looking even in ordinary attire; and now — well, Marjy Chamberlin was a pretty lucky girl! Yes, sir, pretty lucky! She ought to appreciate being chosen at a time like this, when he might ask almost anybody. There were lots of girls, even seniors, who would jump at such a chance,— an escort in evening clothes, and a carriage besides — and Marjy was only a "Freshie." But after all, those problematical seniors were an uncertain quantity and he was sure of a good time with Marjy.

Just at this point in his pleasing soliloquy, sounds of disturbance in the hall broke in upon his revery. It was his brother's voice calling down violent maledictions upon some person or persons unknown. As the owner of the vindictive vocabulary mounted the stairs, a softer, feminine voice joined in, demanding an explanation.

"That dratted tailor sent home my coat without the shoulder padding," Winthrop stormed angrily. "You ought to see it; it sets like sin! Just wait — I'll settle him all right."

"But I didn't know you were going to-night, Winthrop. I thought that you and Marjory were — were not —" Mrs. Porter hesitated with a motherly distaste for probing an open wound.

"We're not," Winthrop answered shortly, "but that's no reason why I should miss the dance. If Marjory thinks I can't get along without her she's mistaken, that's all." The young voice was marred by a sneering bitterness. "I've been trying to per-

suade Missy to go with me, but she's afraid, because she thinks it's a big affair. Go tell her it's all right, will you, mother? She'll enjoy the play, and I can teach her the two-step in no time. It's fortunate I tried on that coat before the Kid got away. I'll have to wear the old clothes after all."

The last sentence was like an electric shock to the gaping listener on the other side of the door. His face showed its pallor even through its freckles. "The old clothes!" Why, that meant his suit — the suit he had on right that minute! For an instant the shock of it robbed him of the power of action, but only for an instant. He glanced wildly at the window, but his den was in the third story, and there was no friendly piazza roof, not even a pipe-line near by, so escape in that direction was hopeless. With a stealthy movement he seized his tickets from the top of the chiffonier. Then followed an even more stealthy "rapid disappearance" act: boy, dress clothes and tickets rolled under the bed in the alcove just as the door was thrown open with a bang, and an authoritative, elder-brotherly voice made its ungentle accents audible.

"Here, Kid, I need those clothes to-night. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped. You may have them again to-morrow."

To-morrow! With tickets, a carriage and Marjy hanging in the balance, for he could never go, now, in ordinary attire — to-morrow! With difficulty the boy restrained the snort of contemptuous disdain which, under happier circumstances, would have greeted so absurd a proposition. But there

was too much at stake to risk even a breathy murmur. His heart was performing a veritable "Anvil Chorus." It seemed as though Winthrop must hear its pounding.

"Look here, Kid — Why, he's gone! Well, by George! If that don't beat the Dutch! The youngster has cleared out already!"

In a last, hopeless attempt to falsify his own statement, the young man, airly attired in a manner which would have been a splendid advertisement for an underclothing firm, strode across the room and peered into the alcove, then threw wide the closet door. Chester hugged himself, metaphorically, for his own astuteness; he had so nearly chosen that closet as his "City of Refuge!"

"Hey, mother! Aunt Mig!" It was the voice of the underwear advertisement who dashed wildly into the hall in his agitation. "Call up the Chamberlin's, and head off the Kid, will you? Hurry!"

"If you want a thing well done," Aunt Mig was beginning didactically, when Winthrop interrupted with scant ceremony.

"Oh, bother Old Standish! I can't. I'm in *statu quo!* Confound it all! Can't you do anything for a fellow? Catch that Kid, I tell you, or I'll have to miss the show altogether."

"Yep," was the errant Kid's wrathful inward comment, "but how about my missing it, you old pie-face!"

Not that Winthrop deserved the fetching personal description — he was considered quite handsome — but simply that his young brother's earlier sense of

gratitude was completely swamped by this calm disposition of his evening's happiness. Besides, the boy's arm was displaying a stinging objection to being used as a pillow, and the operation of straightening it noiselessly in the prescribed limits of the width of a single bed was a strain upon his temper.

Meanwhile somebody held an earnest conversation over the telephone and announced that Chester had not been at the Chamberlin's and was not expected. This message was in turn shouted up-stairs, and was received with a groan by the underwear "ad" and with a flash of uneasiness by Chester himself. Suppose he should get there too late! Suppose Marjy were out! Suppose his carriage came, and left!

"See if he's turned out his light!" floated up from below, and Winthrop, bereft of a more fitting object, vented some of his victimless ire upon the unoffending gas burner. With the disappearance of the light and the departure of his elder brother, Chester's misgivings also took flight. He lay quiet until he heard a door down-stairs slam with volumes of emphasis, then he wriggled forth, linty but jubilant. He had no time to spare on whisk-brooms, however, so he stole along the hall and descended to the second floor via the banister railing.

Here a new difficulty confronted him. Below, on the rack in the front hall, hung his overcoat. To get it meant a challenge, with "Stand and deliver!" as the password. He could not give it. With the courage of desperation he seized his long fishing-pole from the corner of the hall, and shrouded by the friendly folds of a portiére, he managed to hook up

his sweater. Fearing to push his good fortune too far, he dispensed with headgear, and made his exit via the kitchen piazza roof. The hurried scramble down the trellis saved time but failed to add distinction to his already disheveled appearance, as breathless but triumphant, he rang a peremptory peal upon the Chamberlin door-bell.

Mrs. Chamberlin, placidity personified as usual, answered the summons herself.

"Good evening!" she began formally. "Why, it's Chester!"

She surveyed the young man before her in mild astonishment. It was only by a determined effort that she refrained from laughing outright. The incongruity of the capless lad in the shabby old gray sweater with its huge red "C" and the glories partially displayed beneath, appealed irresistibly to her sense of humor; but to her credit she managed to keep a straight face.

"How are you, Ches? Come right in, dear! Some one telephoned for you a few minutes ago. Does mother want anything? If she does, I'll take it with me when I go over to the Bridge Club. What does she need — spoons?"

"No, ma'am. I — I —"

"Come in and play awhile then, dear, if you want to," she urged kindly, serenely unaware that a young man in evening dress, with a carriage and tickets for the Lyceum, would scarcely care to demean himself by "playing." She meant to be kind but that "dear" rankled. Besides there was no time for dallying.

"I wish to see Mar — Miss Marjory, please," Chester demanded firmly.

"Miss Marjory?" Mrs. Chamberlin's voice showed her surprise. "What on earth do you want to see her for?"

"I have tickets for the Lyceum," he answered with dignity, "and I should like to have the pleasure —"

"Oh, I see," she interrupted unceremoniously. "I suppose your mother wouldn't let you go alone."

"I will be pleased to escort Miss Marjory, if she has no other engagement." The boy spoke decisively, feeling that it was time to end such childishness.

"I think she's going with some one else," was the good-humored reply, the lady's eyes twinkling at the boy's lofty tone. "Wait, I'll ask her."

An enigmatical smile crowded the freckles on the boyish face. He had inside information on that subject — Marjy was not going with some one else; she did not expect to go at all. Only that afternoon she had confided to him that she was wild to see the play and stay for the dance, and he had echoed her desire, but tickets at one dollar each were not easily procurable.

Meanwhile Mrs. Chamberlin went to the foot of the stairs with a plump woman's deliberation of movement that was maddening to the impatient caller.

"Marjory! Oh, Marjory! Mar—jo—ry! Here, Tekla," to the stolid looking Swedish maid who appeared, clock and lamp in hand, en route for

the attic; "tell Miss Marjory that MR. PORTER has called to take her to the Lyceum."

Then the good lady, after a prodigious wink at the caller, which he loftily ignored, once more sought her interrupted novel and her easy chair in the sitting-room. Chester drew off his sweater and stalking into the parlor seated himself with great dignity and due regard to the welfare of the fascinating tails. When he looked up he found the maid still standing as though rooted to the spot, staring at him in round-eyed wonder. Just at that moment he heard the sound of a carriage drawing up before the door, and his appreciation of her open-mouthed approval was lost in anxiety over the flight of time. He had promised Mr. Finley that he would go early. That very carriage was probably engaged, later.

"Get a move on you, Tek!" he admonished her impatiently, forgetting his newly acquired dignity. "Tell Miss Marjory to hurry. I'll wait for her in the carriage. Skiddoo, now!"

A few moments later a graceful, girlish figure in floating yellow draperies with a soft yellow fillet binding her masses of fluffy dark hair, hurried down the stairs. She paused at the telephone long enough to deliver an apologetic message, then flew down the outside steps and sprang into the carriage before Chester had time to hand her in as he had planned. But he made up for it by issuing the nonchalant order: "The Lyceum, James!" in the deepest, manliest bass he could compass. The friendly Jim chuckled as he slammed the door and mounted the box, and Chester was just settling back

into a graceful attitude, his coat carefully arranged to avoid unnecessary wrinkles, when the words, and even more, the actions of the vision in yellow shattered his blissful dream and held him speechless in the grip of grim despair. For it was Marjory the aunt, not Marjy the niece who now sat stiffly erect beside him, her chin upraised to a haughty angle, a disdainful smile upon her lips, even while she furtively wiped her eyes on the tiny square of lace-edged linen she had crushed into a hopeless ball.

The next few hours were filled with misery for them both. The boy sat through the play with unseeing eyes. It must have been comical, from the frequent bursts of laughter which sounded all over the hall, but he failed to see any humor in it. He had all he could do to keep back the tears of disappointment. He was not versed in the art of hiding an aching heart; it was his companion who fairly bubbled over with merriment! To think that he should make such "hash" of his evening, as he contemptuously expressed it! Marjory was awfully pretty and he was genuinely fond of her, but — she wasn't Marjy! And there were his tickets and his carriage — wasted!

During the first dance he held down a chair in the least conspicuous corner of the hall and surveyed the gay, whirling throng with sullen eyes. Even his clothes and the evident sensation they had created in the minds of several of his chums failed to lighten his gloom. Suddenly a line in the day's literature lesson flashed into his mind.

"Not failure, but low aim, is crime."

Well, he had certainly aimed high enough. At least he had tried to "hitch his wagon to a star," but it seemed to have been a comet, after all.

Added to his mental misery was a keen physical unrest. The ingrate safety-pin, the link between high-girded trousers and blouse front, had basely shirked its responsibility, and after a spiteful jab or two, had departed, leaving him with the burden of keeping his trousers belt below the horizon of his low-cut vest, if he would present a seemly front to the world at large. But by that time he had reached a point of pessimism where he didn't care, not much, at least — for even the evening's terrible fiasco could not entirely rob him of his triumph over those of his class who were present in their ordinary Sunday suits, "kid clothes!" as he disdainfully apostrophized them. It was soothing to witness their envious scrutiny. Even the Tuxedos were visibly affected. They displayed none of Mrs. Chamberlin's flippancy: like Tekla, their attitude was that of admiring awe.

But the thought of Marjy and his evening as it might have been blotted out these comforting reflections: once more he was enveloped in profound gloom. If he had been familiar with the Persian poet he might have quoted with Omaresque bitterness: "And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd!" Instead he ejaculated with boyish impatience: "Darn it all! I wish I was out of this!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE DANCE AT THE LYCEUM

"Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire."

It had taken the combined efforts of Mrs. Porter, Aunt Mig and Winthrop himself to induce Mystery to accept the invitation for the play and dance, not because it was received at the eleventh hour — she knew that Winthrop himself had given up going, only changing his mind that morning — but because she still shrank from appearing at large affairs, knowing that her pitiful story had necessarily become public property. Up to this time she had been seen in the Porter pew each Sunday, sheltered between Mother Porter and Aunt Mig, and had attended one or two informal gatherings of the Dramatic Club set, with Winthrop as escort; but to face St. George *en masse* seemed more of an ordeal than she could endure.

Yet in spite of this natural shrinking, she was young and full of life, and both play and dance appealed mightily, so she finally gave in to their joint urging. By the time the two ladies had helped her to dress in one of the prettiest frocks in her new "trousseau" she was flushed with excitement and anticipation. The gown was a simple one of pure white chiffon girdled with silver. Its quaint, short-

waisted style suited the slender figure to perfection. Her golden curls were unornamented save for a glittering silver butterfly held in place by a silver cord so that it seemed poised on its own wings above her forehead. In spite of her tiny form she carried herself with an erectness that was almost haughty. As she slipped quietly down-stairs and presented herself before Winthrop with a shy laugh, she was a picture of girlish beauty that justified his long whistle of astonishment and appreciation.

"See who's here!" he exclaimed teasingly, as he took both her hands in his and held her off for inspection. "Is it the Queen of Sheba? I see my finish when the assembled multitude catches sight of you, my little lady! This will be your début before the élite of St. George, and don't forget that my eye will be on you. No flirting, mind! Joking aside, Missy, you look sweet enough to eat! I'm proud of you."

Mystery's face had paled at his mention of the assembled multitude but it flushed rosily at his praise. At the head of the stairs, Mrs. Porter viewed the pretty picture and listened to Win's words with mingled feelings. Her love for Mystery and her pride in her handiwork warred with her sympathy for Marjory, for whom her heart yearned in her unhappiness. She had no desire to enhance the charms of one girl if it meant the undoing of the other, and the wistful look in Marjory's dark eyes haunted her. Winthrop's admiration seemed almost too unreserved for any deeper feeling, still it troubled

her, nevertheless. And Mystery! Could she fail to fall in love with such a handsome, whole-souled man as this big boy of hers? Her mother's heart answered; the reply did not promise a solution of the difficulty.

After running the gauntlet of curious eyes, and gaining the comparative shelter of her own seat, Mystery enjoyed the clever little comedy thoroughly. It was presented by a company of semi-professionals of more than average ability. More than once her light laugh rippled forth so infectiously that people near by smiled in sympathy. She was sitting just within Marjory's line of vision, her glowing face showing its perfect profile each time she turned to her escort. Poor Marjory found it hard to keep her eyes upon the stage: the scene two rows in front meant so much more to her.

At the close of the play the chairs were cleared away by magic, the magic of youth's love of dancing; for the Lyceum's corps of workers was reënforced, for the time being, by all the younger men in the audience. The first strains of the opening two-step made Mystery embarrassed and ill at ease again, in spite of the fact that a slender, silver-slippered foot was keeping time unconsciously to its rollicking measure. Winthrop's trouble over his new clothes had robbed him of the time he had proposed to devote to her terpsichorean education, and she felt decidedly averse to making her first venture in what might be to her a strange art, before so many critical eyes.

"Nonsense!" he ejaculated scornfully, when she

voiced her fears. "Don't be a quitter, Missy! You've probably danced hundreds of times before!"

"But perhaps my people didn't believe in dancing. Suppose I was a Scotch Presbyterian or a Hard Shell Baptist?" she queried, with a mischievous laugh.

He pointed to her foot, still keeping time to the music. "That's evidently a back-slider then," he replied coolly. "I'm willing to take chances. Come on!" And in spite of her pleading he stuck to his guns and demanded his rights with such insistence that she was finally forced to capitulate. He compromised, however, by agreeing to begin in the ante-room.

Marjory's young partner was not so insistent. In fact he was not insistent at all. When the first bars of the opening two-step sounded, he was nowhere in sight. With a light laugh she turned to Courtland, who was hovering, partner-less, in the offing. He had not appeared until after the play was over, so had failed to grasp the state of affairs.

"'Alone and forsaken!' Can't you get me a flat-boat to sit in? This chair fails to carry out the pictured details."

"I'll do better than that," he offered gallantly, wondering what had become of her partner. "I'll change the picture to one more suitable. How will 'The Dancers' do? May I?"

Without waiting for permission he took possession of her card and decorated several spaces with an artistic arrangement of "A. C.'s." Laughing and chatting, they were preparing to fling themselves into

the flying maze of dancers, when Marjory uttered an involuntary exclamation and seized his arm in a convulsive clutch. He turned to ascertain the cause of her excitement, and saw Winthrop and Mystery gliding by in such perfect accord that the commonplace two-step became the very poetry of motion.

The sight seemed to have a strange effect upon him, also. Like his partner he stared after them in silence, forgetting the dance completely. His preoccupation was not lost upon Marjory, who, womanlike, recovered herself first. Since her trouble, her sensitiveness had become painfully acute.

"He's fascinated, too," she thought, with a bitter resentment that hurt her. "Companions in misery!"

And she was right; Courtland was also passing through deep waters. To him the sight of Miss Mystery and Winthrop was far from pleasant, proving, all too clearly, that the approach to land or at least to shallower waters, was not at hand. He stared after the flying couple in frowning absorption.

No hint of Marjory's bitterness showed in the light laugh with which, an instant later, she greeted his suggestion that they begin to dance or the number would be over; but then she laughed often of late, although a connoisseur might not have approved the quality of her mirth.

These evenings at the Lyceum were affairs of the most informal sort. The elders, save a few who refused to acknowledge the impeachment, were considerate enough to leave immediately after the play and, the chaperons were addicted to bridge; in fact that

was their first qualification, and an ante-room was always in readiness.

The programmes invariably included several old-fashioned square dances sandwiched in between the ever popular two-steps — a sop, probably, to the "old-youngs" who refused to be shunted off to bed. When the first of these, the Lancers, was called, the masculine part of the assembly went through a rite which, to the uninitiated, would have seemed truly mysterious. To a man they broke off abruptly the animated or tenderly subdued conversations they were carrying on in groups or "two-somes," and made a dash for some part of the dancing floor. There they flung down their handkerchiefs, dashed back to their partners, and resumed their interrupted conversations. During the interval between this strange performance and the dance itself, the floor of the hall resembled a field that had been through a snowstorm of a peculiar kind, with few flakes, but those few of tremendous size. When the music sounded, no grand scramble for places ensued, although heated arguments over the ownership of a handkerchief sometimes occurred.

When the sets were formed, Winthrop, with Mystery as a reluctant partner, discovered, to his chagrin, that he was opposite Bessie Thorne, his particular detestation. Miss Thorne was not a chip of the old block, he was wont to assert, but a good big section. He had had great difficulty in persuading Mystery to join in the Lancers at all; by the time his determination had conquered, few handkerchiefless places remained. It was a case of tak-

ing chances in regard to the others in the set, or of remaining out altogether; so he had tossed his place-marker into the first available space.

When Mystery saw her vis-à-vis she gave an involuntary start of dismay but pluckily refrained from comment, even when Miss Thorne stared straight into her face without the quiver of a muscle, deliberately ignoring her nod and smile of recognition.

Winthrop witnessed the cut. His fists clenched as he muttered something through his set teeth that would not have found a place in the "fit to print" columns. It was the first overt act of antagonism on the part of the Thornes, though Mystery's sensitive nature had instinctively divined their feeling toward her. It made him long to champion the little woman's cause with all the strength of his manhood.

During the delay that ensued while several belated couples were being accommodated, Miss Thorne motioned to the two other girls in the set and the three engaged in a whispered confab. The trio stood directly behind Marjory who was dancing with Courtland in the next set. She caught enough of the conversation, subdued though it was, to understand its purport.

"Oh! how can they be so cruel! Missy would never get over such a public insult!"

"Mother says the Porters have no right to force her upon us socially," Bessie was whispering in resentful tones. "It's not fair! How do we know what she was! You may do as you please, of course,

but I intend to drop out. It would serve Winthrop right if we all did it. Will you?"

Marjory's dark eyes flashed angrily. She made an impulsive movement to interfere, but the recollection of the possible construction that might be put upon it, restrained her. She could not deliberately expose herself to ridicule, or to even the suspicion of jealousy: it was too much to expect of any girl in her position. Then the thought of Miss Mystery's mortification came uppermost. It would do her incalculable harm. People would hear only one side of it, and put their own construction upon the affair. And Winthrop! No matter how sturdily he might champion her, he could never erase the ugly incident from their minds. She flung her head back determinedly as her better self conquered. With a hasty word of explanation to her partner she faced the mischief-maker and preferred her request in tones intentionally audible.

"Will you do me a favor, Bess?" she demanded gayly; the Dramatic Club had witnessed no better acting than hers at that moment.

Bessie nodded promptly.

"Exchange places with me, won't you?" Again Marjory's clear tones carried effectually.

"But — but I — I don't —" Bessie's stammer trailed off into an unintelligible murmur.

"I know you don't want to," Marjory replied with a laugh. "It's hard to tear yourself away from such beautiful dancers, but please do, to oblige me, that's a dear girl! Win and I are determined to teach Missy to dance square dances — that is, if she needs

any teaching — aren't we, Win? So I want to be in the same set in case she gets confused. Thank you, Bess. I'll do as much for you, some day."

Bessie relinquished her place in a dazed sort of a way, and Winthrop, who had a premonition that the whispered confab boded no good to his trembling little partner, flashed a look of gratitude at Marjory that gladdened her heart until the thought: "He's thankful because I saved her from mortification!" stifled her joy.

"What a brick you are, Marjory!" he whispered, as they neared each other in the dance. "Not one girl in a thousand would have done what you did."

After all, Mystery needed little guidance. A slight hesitation once or twice at the change of figures was all that betrayed her novitiate. Every movement was light and graceful, and more than one onlooker watched her in surprise, then turned with an admiring comment upon her dancing.

"That settles it!" Miss Thorne announced decisively, her eyes following the graceful figure. "She's a vaudeville dancer! Queer we didn't think of that before, isn't it? She's just the right build, small and thin. Some third-rate company, probably; that's why we never heard of her. And to think what a fool people make of her!"

"This evening's performance settles the Scotch Presbyterian and the Soft Shell Crab — I mean Hard Shell Baptist, my lady!" Winthrop whispered teasingly. "You're a dancer from Danceville!"

During the rest of the evening, though she refused the partners who thronged about her, and danced only

with Winthrop, Mystery entered into the fun as heartily as any one, yet in spite of her girlish enjoyment there was a womanly reserve about her that proved very attractive; so much so that one man, who abhorred dances, and seldom stayed longer than the drop of the curtain, remained until the last expiring wail of the violins. His eyes followed the slight figure as it glided back and forth past the place where he stood, propping up one of the walls as religiously as though his support were actually needed. There was an indefinable look in their depths.

"Dr. Guthrie, by all that's unholy!" one of the men exclaimed. "You'll be tripping the light fantastic before long, I'll warrant."

"Well? Why not?" was the prompt retort. "Can't begin any younger, can I?"

"Shall I get you a partner?"

"Thank you, no! When I want one I'll choose her myself — if she'll have me!" he added in an undertone.

At the close of the first half of the programme Courtland drew Winthrop aside. His face was set and unsmiling.

"Look here, Porter, I don't understand this. If I invited a lady to a dance, I'd at least see that she was provided with partners."

"But suppose she doesn't care to dance with others?" Winthrop countered, thinking he referred to Miss Mystery. "You have my permission, Courtland, if you can get hers. And by the way," as a dainty vision in yellow flashed by, "fair exchange,

you know! I claim the same privilege with your partner."

"Sorry, but I haven't any."

"Why, I thought — weren't you to bring Mar — Miss Chamberlin?"

"I was, but she threw me over at the last minute as you are aware." This emphasis was significant.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, nothing!" Courtland shrugged his shoulders in aggravating indifference.

"Then why do you ring in my name?"

"Simply because she said that you had called for her, when she asked me to excuse her."

"That I had called for her?" Winthrop stared at him in incredulous amaze.

"She certainly said 'Mr. Porter' when she telephoned me," he insisted. "Perhaps she was joking, but —" he moved away to claim his next partner, leaving his sentence unfinished: it was a sore subject with him. His friend seemed to be all-conquering; that "preserve" of his had no boundaries other than his errant fancy dictated.

Winthrop stood still and glowered upon the dancers wondering what Courtland meant. In spite of errors of omission or commission on the part of "that dratted tailor," he was looking decidedly handsome, though a thundercloud rested upon the stern young face. His eyes instinctively sought Marjory who was gliding about indefatigably, apparently in the gayest of spirits. His gloomy gaze followed her course down the hall until he caught sight of Chester, marooned in sulky isolation in a desert of chairs

in the farthest corner. Misery loves company: he edged his way towards him.

"Where's Marjy?" he inquired casually, remembering that the boy had had two tickets.

"Home!"

"Home? Did you come alone?"

"Nope!"

"Don't be so communicative, Kid!" he urged teasingly. "Whom did you bring?"

At that moment Marjory whirled by and flung a saucy greeting over her shoulder. The boy motioned towards her with an ugly little laugh.

"Marjory! By George! You certainly were nervy!" was Winthrop's cutting reception of the news. "Flying high to-night, aren't you? So that's what Courtland meant! I hope she enjoyed her kindergarten! Kids of your age are not accountable, but I'm surprised that she accepted."

"She didn't! I didn't, I mean! She — now I —" Chester became incoherent in his effort to explain. "I wanted — her — but she thought I wanted her, so —"

"For Heaven's sake, Kid, that's worse than a Chinese puzzle! Who thought what?"

"Mrs. Chamberlin thought it was Marjory, and she thought — Oh, the dickens! I don't know what she thought." He settled into sulky silence.

"Look here! What are you driving at? What did Marjory think?" In his eagerness Winthrop grasped his brother's arm more forcibly than he realized. "Stop mumbling and explain, can't you?"

"You let go my arm, Winthrop Porter!" Chester whispered fiercely, his quick resentment roused by his brother's dictatorial attitude, which seemed the culmination of a series of untoward incidents.

"Tell me what she said, Ches!" Winthrop's tone became wheedling, and the belittling grip changed to an encouraging pat. "Go on, that's a good fellow! I'll make it all right with you."

That promise touched a vulnerable spot in Chester's armor of injured dignity. To "make it all right" meant but one thing, and to a boy on a meager allowance, with all sorts of boyish fads and fancies, it was not to be despised. He proceeded to tell the whole story of his evening's fiasco.

"And when she came flying down the steps and jumped into the carriage she called me a 'dear, forgiving old boy' and began something about being sorry because she'd acted so. Then I knew it wasn't Marjy — she don't fly off the reel like that — but I couldn't say anything; I didn't want to hurt her feelings."

"Of course not!" Winthrop agreed. "What did she do then?"

"She tried to put her arms around my neck and kiss me, but I ducked, and she said: 'Why, Chester!' and then — oh! that's all!"

"Then what?" Winthrop insisted. "Go on!"

"Oh! she cried — she didn't know I saw her — and twisted her handkerchief up into a little ball, but she stopped off all of a sudden and stamped her foot and said: 'I don't care! I don't care a bit! Not a bit! so there!' After that she laughed and

talked about all sorts of things, and — and that's all."

"Are you sure you've told it straight?"

"Sure I am!" was the reply, and Winthrop's face was fairly radiant as he said gently: "Look here, Kid, I'm sorry I said you were nervy for asking her, but —"

"I didn't ask her, I tell you," Chester interrupted shortly. "I wanted Marjy, but that greenhorn Swede of theirs got it twisted just because I asked for 'Miss Marjory.' I thought that sounded better with a carriage and — and these," touching his clothes in somewhat shamefaced explanation. "Why, Mrs. Chamberlin called me 'Mr. Porter,' honest she did!"

"Whew!" Winthrop whistled understandingly. "So that was it, was it! We'll fix things in two shakes of a lamb's tail, my son. Go after Marjy right away: I'll telephone Mrs. Chamberlin to have her ready. Hurry! You'll still have half the dances."

"No good now," the boy objected gloomily. "She's in bed by this time. Anyhow, Finley wouldn't lend me another carriage even if I'd ask him."

"Oh, d—, bother the carriage!" Winthrop remembered his pedestal just as he was toppling over. "Take one both ways and charge it to me. Get her a box of candy, too. I'll fix Mrs. Chamberlin all right. Good luck to you!" But Chester was out of hearing.

"And to myself!" he added softly as he hung up the receiver and hurried after a couple just disappearing in the direction of the ante-room, where a

mild concoction dignified by the name of punch was dispensed. The girlish figure in golden gauze was on Courtland's arm but what did that matter now! He knew what he knew, thanks to Chester!

"A word with you, Courtland!" he demanded confidently when he came up to them.

Courtland glowered but obeyed. Marjory strolled on towards the ante-room.

"I'm in search of my partner," Winthrop informed him with enlightening emphasis.

"I fail to see how that fact concerns me," Courtland retorted.

"But I want Marjory!"

"Now, see here, Porter," Courtland began angrily, resenting the cheerful grin on the other's face, "I've kept away from that 'preserve' to which you referred so feelingly the other morning on the Battery, but I don't intend to stand any more nonsense. What are you, anyway — a Mormon? You can't have an option on all the girls in St. George while you're making up your mind! I won't —"

"You blind old bat!" Winthrop interrupted, slapping him on the back in the old familiar style. "My mind's been made up for ages. There's only one girl in the world for me, and she's IT! We've had a slight misunderstanding, that's all!"

"But Miss Mystery?"

"I'll be a brother to her. Go in and win, my son. Wish you luck!"

With the words Winthrop hurried over to Marjory. Drawing her arm through his with a possessive gesture that was unmistakable, he marched

her off towards the deserted upper end of the hall, to a palm-secluded corner where the terms of the peace pact could be satisfactorily arranged. During the rest of the evening more than one man wasted a precious section of the dial in fruitless search for his partner, but Marjory of the flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, hidden behind her leafy screen, was oblivious to such mundane affairs as two-steps and partners. In fact neither she nor Winthrop was cognizant of the fact that there were any other people in the world, until their retreat was ruthlessly invaded by Courtland.

"Excuse me," he addressed Winthrop breathlessly, "but do you intend to take Marjory home?"

"You may bank on that, Courty!" Winthrop assured him promptly.

"But what about Miss Mystery?"

"By George! That's so. I'd forgotten all about her!" Winthrop spoke in a voice of contrition. "I'll have to —"

"I — I'm going around that way, Win," his friend offered magnanimously. "If you like, I'll —"

"Thanks, old man! That's good of you. I'll help you out some day."

Courtland grinned: Winthrop, unknown to himself — for no one is more selfishly absorbed than a lover — was helping him out mightily, right that minute.

As the strains of "Home, Sweet Home" were wafted upon the midnight air, Chester Porter held open the door of the carriage in which Marjy was

already seated, importantly erect and flushed with the evening's pleasure. He was torn between gallantry and selfishness, but the former finally won the day.

"We'll take Marjory and Missy with us, Win," he called out. "Tell them to come on — there's lots of room."

"That's all right, Kid," Winthrop called back, "but we'll see to the girls. Good night!" and the carriage door slammed importantly as the boy and girl were whirled away.

"I'm going to take Miss Mystery home," Courtland remarked confidently; but when he turned towards her, it was only to see her disappearing on the arm of a tall figure. He stared after them in speechless surprise. Winthrop chuckled aggravatingly as he remarked:

"Dr. Guthrie's a disciple of David Harum, isn't he? He believes in doing it 'fust'!"

Courtland ignored the sally. Without a word he strode off towards his boarding-place, which lay diametrically opposite the Porter's; but his thoughts might well have caused a consuming fire in the doctor's left ear, the member of the human anatomy popularly supposed to record unfavorable comments.

"And I'll see Marjory home — if she will trust herself to me," Winthrop whispered in a confident undertone that vibrated with passionate love and longing. "Will she?"

"She will."

The answer, low though it was, evidently carried conviction with it, for the dark head was pressed

close to the glossy shoulder, and rested there as contentedly as though the maligned tailor had done his full duty in the padding line. But Winthrop, manlike, could not let well enough alone. The duet in the palm-screened corner had been too deeply engrossed with the theme of the future to enter into the details of the past. Like the Yankee he still "wanted to know!"

"I thought you were going with Courtland tonight," he ventured at last.

"I was."

"Well?"

"I didn't."

"So I see, but why?"

Marjory hesitated, blushing rosy red in her embarrassment, but finally she confessed frankly. "When Tekla said that Mr. Porter had called for me, I — I telephoned Arthur not to come. Then I found it was only —"

"The Kid, bless him!"

Just at that moment the object of the blessing was gravely shaking hands with "Miss Marjory" — she would be plain Marjy again to-morrow — and thanking her for her company. Then he turned to the driver with the words: "That will do, James! I prefer to walk the rest of the way."

Life was full, very full! And he had hitched his wagon to a star after all. The rest of the way — fully one-hundred feet — was all too short to contain his blissful reveries. They accompanied him up to the den and assisted in removing and caring for his precious clothes. They hovered near as he

held up the mirror and scrutinized his smooth lip searchingly, even mitigating in a measure, the sting of the fruitless scrutiny. They remained until sleep blotted them out of his mind, and other visions, not so delightful, took their place. He dreamed that Marjy called him a "dear old man!" and tried to hug him, and that he made his escape only by jumping into a forty-horse-power automobile. Possibly the two-pound box of chocolate-covered cherries he had presented to Marjy — driving several blocks out of his way to secure them, and charging them unblushingly to Winthrop — had something to do with his dream. At least he had done his duty manfully in helping her dispose of them later. But whatever the cause of the disturbing vision, he was rapidly approaching the age that does not seek escape from feminine endearments, providing they come from the right source, no! not even in a high-powered motor!

CHAPTER IX

THE LAWYER'S LETTER

"Some for the Glories of this World; and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come:
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go . . ."

Aunt Mig loved both her nephews devotedly, but with a difference. To Winthrop she ascribed every virtue that a man could possibly possess, and though often dictatorial, she bowed before him with an abjectness all the more touching because there were so few people before whom she bowed at all. If his bump of common sense had not been well developed, he would have been utterly spoiled by her adoration.

During his High School days she was wont to refer casually to "my nephew, Porter, who won the medal for mathematics," or "who holds the tennis championship." Later, during his collegiate years, she repaired to Columbia on every occasion on which visitors were expected, and sometimes when they were not, but Winthrop hospitably hid this fact from her, and grinned cheerfully over the "rigging" he was forced to endure from the fellows.

"Auntie been up to inspect tootsie-wootsie's unnerwear yet?" "Mercy! mercy! does Auntie like her 'ittle boydie to play football? Might hurt his

pitty 'ittle nosey!" were some of the jibes her inopportune visits called forth; but Winthrop usually silenced them effectually by displaying a check with "Auntie's" signature. Possibly the self-denial that went into those frequent gifts was lost upon the young man; she had her teacher's salary, he thought, forgetting the luxuries she might have purchased to brighten her austere life; but, unknown to himself her loving interest proved no small factor in keeping him "straight." He was proud of her, too, and with reason. She was a woman of broad culture, with an education not to be despised even by the greatest men of the earth — college undergrads! She could catch them napping in "math" and trip them up in Greek, while the "ologies" were her favorite stamping ground. They respected her highly in spite of their jibes.

During these college years the good lady's conversation was freely interlarded with references to the honors, academic and athletic, that were being heaped upon "my nephew, *MR.* Porter!" On one occasion she found herself in heart-to-heart confab with Columbia's guest of honor, a renowned statesman whom she had longed fervently to meet; but when she learned that he was not personally acquainted with Winthrop, and not even cognizant of his rocket-like progress through Columbia's halls of learning, she promptly lost all veneration for him.

Between Aunt Mig and her younger nephew there existed a perpetual feud. There was no hint of worship in her attitude towards Chester: quite the reverse in fact, though she would have denied her-

self to any extent for his sake. Undoubtedly there was much truth in the boy's complaint that she "picked" at him, even though her constant correction was for his good, as she thought. The armed truce that existed between them would speedily have become bitter warfare had not Mrs. Porter, with an ingenuity developed by many years of practice, intervened at the first muttered warnings.

The morning after the dance, Aunt Mig appeared in the dining-room before Katy began to put breakfast on the table. School rules were rigid; she never waited for laggards. As usual she was immaculate in a tailored suit of dark gray mixture, with snowy shirt-waist, and mannish collar and tie. This costume was varied, at suppertime, by a different shirt-waist and a suit of less severe gray, but she was still strictly "tailored"; Aunt Mig in negligée or "fluffy ruffles" was beyond the family's conception. She herself frankly voiced her contempt for such fripperies.

As she stepped over to the window and stood watching the withered leaves that danced across the tennis court or whirled into little eddies in the corners of the piazza steps, her eyes grew moody; the scene pictured too vividly the year's middle-age! It seemed to typify her own life. Spring with its effervescence of sap and bud, and summer's gayety of blossom — the fulfillment of promise — both gone past recall: only the sere and yellow, wind-swept autumn left, with winter's burial close at hand. With a wistful sigh that her life's spring and summer had been so meager — she had ruthlessly re-

jected love's offering in the arrogance of youthful devotion to her calling — she quoted aloud gloomily:

"The melancholy days are come,
The saddest of the year."

"Just too cold for ice-cream
And too hot for beer!"

a boyish voice finished with impish satisfaction.

Miss Mig turned in sharp disgust, her mournful musing giving place to angry resentment, but Chester had dashed out into the hall whistling shrilly, with Bugs in full cry, after him. With a gesture of impotent anger she seated herself at the table and attacked her breakfast in a savage mood that craved expression.

It was not long before the opportunity offered. An inadvertent remark of Chester's started her off on her hobby; once mounted, nothing short of an earthquake or a cyclone could have stopped her. Privately, her relatives doubted even their efficacy. The boy's words were innocent enough, after all, scarcely deserving the tirade they brought upon the family's defenseless heads.

"I just wish you could see the motor-cycle a man's trying to sell at Finley's; it's a beaut! I'm going to have one some day, you bet!"

"You may, when we get rich, Kid!" Winthrop assured him jovially; as a result of the previous evening's readjustment he was once more overflowing with good will towards the whole world. "But don't hold your breath until you get it, will you? I'd hate to have you die so young."

"Yes, when we get rich!" Chester grumbled. "You're pretty safe in your offer, Win. Wish we were rich right now; I'd buy it before you could say Jack Robinson!"

"Why not John Smith?" Winthrop inquired lazily. "That's shorter." But Chester ignored the interruption and went on piling up his castles in Spain, while his aunt's lips set into lines of grim determination.

"If we were rich, I'd get a bob-sled, too, and a motor-boat, and a big tent, and a runabout and —"

"That will do, Chester!" Aunt Mig commanded sternly. "Think how many boys would like to stand in your shoes."

"They ain't shoes, they're sneakers!" the boy muttered in flippant resentment, but he was careful not to voice his remark audibly: he was never allowed to "talk back!"

As Mrs. Porter once confided to a sympathetic neighbor: "It takes a saint or a deaf, dumb and blind woman to live peaceably with 'in-laws' while she's raising children." She herself was neither one nor the other, but for the sake of avoiding family wrangles she had learned not only to curb her own impatience at interference, but to smooth things over to the boys by reminding them that their aunt loved them, and would do anything for them.

"If the wealth of the world were divided, Chester," Aunt Mig went on, thoroughly enjoying the chance to mount her favorite hobby, "do you think you'd have as much as you have now? Do you think you'd live in a home like this? Certainly

not! Never covet riches, my boy; enough is as good as a feast."

"Depends on what you call enough!" Chester protested.

"Enough to eat, enough to wear, enough health, enough strength! I thank the Lord," she ejaculated piously, "that we are not rich. All the wealth in the world couldn't make you happier than you are now. It would probably make you miserable."

"I'm willing to take the risk, all right!" the boy retorted sullenly. "Guess you'd be, too, if you had a chance. Anyway, I'd hate to try you!"

"Chester!" Mrs. Porter warned imploringly.

"Well, I would!" he persisted doggedly. "People who are poor always talk like that, but they change their tune mighty suddenly if they get rich."

"Would riches make you any happier than you are now?" his aunt queried sternly.

"Lots!" he assured her with Spartan brevity.

"In what way, pray?" Aunt Mig's thirst for information was suspicious; had Chester been wise he would have compromised then and there.

"I'd have what I want, and do what I want, and say what I want! There!" he finished his triumphant list.

Up to that time his aunt had been preparing for the gallop, adjusting bridle and stirrup, as it were — no spur was necessary; but Chester's last words were like a cut of the whip to a restive steed. She began a philippic against riches so bitter that it left her hearers stunned, breathless.

"Money ought never to be accumulated," she

finished dogmatically. "It's the curse of a nation, an individual! In cases where such accumulation has occurred it should be divided!"

Chester threw himself into the breach the instant she paused for breath; not that her socialistic theories ever had the slightest effect upon his boyish armor of indifference, but because he saw, from the look on his mother's face, that it was "up to him to put on the check-rein!"

"Mrs. Thorne cornered me while they were getting ready to dance, last night," he addressed his mother with a disgusted growl. "She tried to get hold of Win, but he saw her first and dodged, so that let me in for a pumping. I'm awfully glad you were around when they were giving out mothers; I'd hate to have drawn her!"

"Why, Chester!" Mrs. Porter remonstrated, her shocked tones contradicted by the amused twinkle in her eyes.

"Well, I would! She's a regular old question-mark. When she got through with me I felt like a squeezed dish-rag. I'll bet she'd stop at the door of Heaven and pump St. Peter himself about the people inside. No, she wouldn't, though, because she'd never have the chance: she's too blamed disagreeable to get even as far as the gate!"

"Chester!" This time Mrs. Porter's tone brooked no nonsense. Boyish flippancy was one thing, but she refused to tolerate comments that smacked of irreverence.

"Well, she makes me tired, anyway. She asked a million things about — er —"

"Don't mind me, Ches!" Mystery encouraged him with a laugh. "I don't see how she had any questions left, though; she asked me so many that day we met near the bank. I tried to evade her, but I wasn't quick enough."

In the privacy of her own room, the room which Mrs. Porter had gradually beautified until it was as dainty as any daughter could desire, Mystery had fought more than one battle. At times the burden of those hidden years seemed heavier than she could bear. She felt that she must pierce their secret, must tear away the veil that shrouded them. Oh! to know! Again she shrank with dread from the very thought of knowledge; what might it not reveal? She was aware that she was an object of curiosity and comment; that her unknown past was a subject of frequent discussion, and it seemed to eat into her very soul. Then into the midst of her agonized struggles would come the thought of the loving care that surrounded her — a thought strong enough to dissipate those darker shapes that were beating against her sensitive nature, and calm her into resignation, if not acceptance of her clouded life. But it was terrible to be nameless, yet to deliberately adopt a name was a confession of failure she shrank from making. Of late, thanks to a hint or two judiciously dropped by Mrs. Porter and Aunt Mig, she was frequently referred to as "Miss Porter" or "Mystery Porter," a concession for which she was not ungrateful.

In spite of these times of stress, she always presented a brave front to the family, so she was in

earnest when she encouraged Chester to unburden his mind.

"Well, she did ask some things about you," the boy admitted grudgingly, still possessed with his grievance. "Then she began on Walter —"

"Walter?" Mrs. Porter repeated in surprise. "What on earth did she have to say about him?"

"She wanted to know whether we'd heard from him lately. When I said 'no, not for a long time,' she began a regular rigmarole about young men who were too lazy to settle down and work."

"But Walter was never lazy." Mrs. Porter promptly took up arms for her favorite. "I don't think that boy had a lazy bone in his whole body. Chester is speaking of Walter Warren, a school friend of Winthrop's," she explained to Mystery. "After his father died, he and his mother were left without a cent. Walter did all sorts of odd jobs — anything to make a dollar or two — and Mrs. Warren took in plain sewing. She was determined to give him a good education, but she was too delicate to stand the strain; she only lived a year after his father's death. Then the poor boy planned to keep house all by himself in Sylvester's garage, and pay the rent by helping about the grounds, but —"

"Mother wouldn't stand for that!" Winthrop interrupted, a ring of pride in his voice. "She pestered the poor fellow night and day, until he didn't dare call his soul his own. She had him right under her thumb."

"It hurt me to think of a lad like that living all alone," Mrs. Porter explained. "Imagine Chester

in such circumstances! The Warrens were a fine old family, quite well-to-do at one time, you know, before the father failed. I finally persuaded him to come to us. We were all fond of him — he and Winthrop had been together almost constantly — and we had plenty of room; this is a rubber house, you know."

"I should say I do!" Mystery replied, with a grateful smile into the speaker's twinkling eyes.

"'Persuaded' is good!" Winthrop commented. "She kidnaped him, Missy, actually kidnaped him; but old Walt fairly worshiped her."

"Win! How foolish! I simply made him see that he could do better work in school if he lived properly. And we never had cause to regret his coming, either. He lived with us for five years, then he went away to find work. He said he couldn't shake off the feeling that he would do better somewhere else. It has been years since we've heard from him. I'm afraid he hasn't succeeded and is ashamed to confess it, poor fellow. I was opposed to his going, you know; New York offers opportunities enough, it seems to me."

"You got a whack, last night, too, mother." Chester remarked, with a chuckle. "Mrs. Thorne said it served you right to have Walter go off and forget you, because you were always being taken in by — I mean — Bugs! What are you doing there, you rascal? Come here, sir!" The boy tried to cover his confusion by scolding the unoffending animal, but when the big brown eyes looked up at him, mutely craving pardon for something he had not

done, he sacrificed his last sausage to appease the dog's wounded feelings.

"Can't open your mouth without putting your foot in it, can you, Kid?" Winthrop demanded shortly. "I advise you —"

"Please, Win, don't!" Mystery pleaded. "Chester's all right, andI love him as much as ever." She reached over teasingly and tried to pat his hand, but the boy jerked it away. He was tremendously fond of this new sister of his, but he had no relish for feminine endearments, either public or private, as Mystery knew, and only a spirit of girlish mischief prompted her to proffer them. Her manner became serious enough as she added: "Perhaps your mother is foolish to take a total stranger into her home, Ches, but I hope to be able to repay her some day."

"You're doing it now!" Three voices spoke as one.

"You're all so — so good — I — I can't —" Mystery choked and left her sentence unfinished, but she smiled gratefully even though there were tears in her eyes.

"There! now see what you've done!" Aunt Mig glared accusingly at Chester. "If I were your mother I should punish you for repeating such gossip."

"But you're not, thank Heaven!" the boy muttered in a fervent undertone. With a hasty "Scuse me!" he left the table, chanting provokingly:

"The solemncholy days are come,
The saddest of the year;

The ice bill still is with us,
And the coal bill, too, is here!"

He opened the front door just in time to receive the morning mail. As the postman handed in the bundle of letters and circulars, he commented upon the travel-stained appearance of one of them, an imposing-looking official envelope sealed with red wax and bearing a foreign stamp.

"This fellow's a traveler all right!" he remarked jovially. "Guess he's gone pretty near 'round the world. I wouldn't mind taking his journey myself, but I'm afraid I'll have to wait until airships are a drug on the market before I start out."

"Here's a big fellow for you, mother," Chester called out. "Come on! I want—"

"You want to hurry, young man, or you'll be late for school!" Aunt Mig warned in sharp tones, as she sped down the path, her usual brisk gait decidedly accelerated. Her hobby-ride had kept her at the table longer than usual, and Miss Porter, late, was a phenomenon beyond the imagination of St. George's High School contingent, with whom, in spite of her austerity, she was very popular. His aunt's rush affected Chester, also; he thrust the letter into his mother's hand and did a double-quick down the path in her wake.

"How's the baby?" Mrs. Porter inquired of the postman, peering near-sightedly at the official envelope as she spoke.

"Chipper as can be!" was the reply. New arrivals were an annual event in his family, but frequency failed to dull his fatherly pride. He

launched into a glowing description of the youngster's virtues while sorting the mail for the immediate neighborhood. The Porter place was his half-way station. "That's a foreign letter. It's from Australia."

"Australia! Who on earth could be writing to me from Australia? I don't know any one there."

"P'raps some one's left you a house an' lot," he hazarded, as he shouldered his pack and tramped down the steps. "Stranger things have happened!"

Smiling at the man's words, Mrs. Porter reentered the hall where Mystery was already busying herself with the numberless little tasks that fall to the lot of the housewife. She had gradually taken more and more of this extra work upon her young shoulders, deferring her kindergarten course until the New Year, at Mrs. Porter's urgent request. She flitted from place to place, attending to the plants, the birds, and the kittens, re-filling the flower vases and tidying desk and tables, with evident enjoyment in her work. Mrs. Porter often followed her with loving eyes, while Bugs tagged at her heels with unwearied devotion.

"Missy, dear! Bring me my spectacles! They're on the parlor table. No! they're in the top drawer of the desk, I think."

A moment later Mystery hurried into the sitting-room and herself arranged the spectacles, while Mrs. Porter sat quiet, enjoying the little thrill the unaccustomed service brought to her.

The letter began with the business-like address,

and the formal "Dear Madam." As she read the first few lines, her eyes brimmed with tears. Letting it drop into her lap, she buried her face in her hands and sobbed unrestrainedly.

"Poor lad! Poor lad!" she murmured brokenly. "And to think — we were speaking of him this very morning! I feared something was wrong when we heard nothing from him all these years. It wasn't like Walter to neglect us; he was too affectionate, and too grateful. To think that he's been dead for months — just at the beginning of his career, too! And to die alone in a strange land! Such a pity! God knows what's best, but it's hard for us to understand, sometimes."

Drying her eyes, but with lips still trembling, she turned again to the letter and read a sentence or two further, then drew in her breath in sheer amazement.

"Oh! it can't be! It can't be! There must be some mistake!"

But a second, a third, even a fourth perusal of the letter only served to bring deeper conviction in their train. It was written by a lawyer in Melbourne, and stated that Walter Warren had met his death suddenly, several months earlier. He gave no details, simply the unvarnished announcement of the fact. Then there followed, in somewhat involved legal phraseology, the astounding statements that the deceased had inherited a large fortune; that according to the terms of his will drawn up some time previous, everything he possessed reverted, without conditions of any sort, to his foster-mother, Mrs. Porter. This in turn was followed by the still more

astounding statement that the property awaiting the said Mrs. Porter's disposition amounted to more than one million dollars. It was invested in various securities, an itemized list of which was appended, and included many acres of grazing lands; but the real fountain-head of the fortune was an interest in a gold mine that was still yielding at a profitable rate.

The letter concluded with a few formal words, a masterly mingling of condolence and congratulation, and an earnest proffer of the writer's willingness to continue in charge of the Warren interests in Australia, should such be the heir's desire.

Mrs. Porter rocked back and forth vigorously, alternately fanning herself with the letter and opening it up for rereading. Her mind was a chaos of conflicting emotions. The whole thing seemed like a dream — a fairy tale! She, Mother Porter, a millionaire! Or ought she say a "millionairess"? It couldn't be! It must be a joke, or at least a mistake. But there was the letter! And she had never at any one time in her life, had five thousand dollars in actual money! True, they lived in comfort, but there was never any surplus; and at times, especially of late, with prices soaring heavenward, only vigorous stretching brought the two ends together. And now to have a million! It seemed incredible, yet it must be true; the terms of the communication alone were high-sounding enough to carry conviction to the unlegal mind. But how on earth could Walter Warren have amassed such a fortune in a few short years? That also seemed in-

credible until another reference to the lawyer's letter made it clear: he had inherited it. But from whom? He had been absolutely alone in the world, as far as she knew. She began to feel resentful towards the writer of the letter; it was not fair to withhold the details, especially in regard to the cause of his early death.

This thought brought the man himself to her mind: "Old Sobersides," the boys affectionately dubbed him, tall, broad-shouldered, and handsome in his serious way, but in such deadly earnest about everything he undertook that Winthrop always vowed he was a re-incarnation, or at least an octogenarian, who, in some miraculous fashion, had retained his youthful appearance. Her lips trembled as she recalled the day he left them. She felt again his clumsy, bashful caress, that was like the affectionate demonstration of an ungainly puppy. She heard again his troubled attempt to explain that he was leaving only because he felt he must. Yes, there had been genuine love between them, accentuated on his part by an exaggerated idea of his debt to her. And now he was paying that debt! The remembrance brought the tears afresh. Poor boy! such a short life! She had tried in vain to keep him with them longer, but the failure of his first efforts to secure a satisfactory position left him possessed with the idea that he must go in search of the fortune that refused to come to him. Well, he had evidently found it, but oh! the pity of it! the pity of it!

The first shock of surprise and grief over, she was

eager to share the great news with some one. Mystery was nowhere in sight, and she remembered that both Aunt Mig and Chester were to remain at school for the entire day, the former because it was her week to chaperon in the lunch-room, the latter to lunch luxuriously at the expense of one of his chums in payment of a football bet. To Chester, eating at a café, even one as modest as the High School lunch-room, smacked of manly emancipation. There was a metropolitan flavor about it that appealed to him mightily.

Recalling the conversation at the breakfast table, Mrs. Porter rejoiced in her sister-in-law's absence. It would give her time to collect her forces; to be ready for the denunciatory bombs that would be hurled upon her, now that she belonged to the moneyed class. With such socialistic ideas, such scorn of riches and luxury, how Mig would rant and rave over the news! That she would use every effort in her power to bring about the surrender of the fortune, or at least part of it, was a foregone conclusion. That she would prove a formidable antagonist, Mrs. Porter knew by experience. But in this case she determined to stand firm, not so much for her own sake — money meant little to her — but for the sake of the boys.

Across the dividing fence Marjory was stitching away at her fancy work, wondering whether Winthrop had told his mother what had happened at the dance; wondering, also, with a thrill of uneasiness, about the package wrapped in green glazed paper, hidden deep in a box in Miss Mystery's top

drawer. Why had Winthrop given it to her if he did not love her? Was it in a fit of pique because she had returned it? Had she, Marjory, been too eager to renew the engagement? Had she consented too readily? Certainly the presence of the package in that particular place needed an explanation, a very definite one, too. She ought to have demanded it the night before, but — A blush supplied the reason for her dereliction of duty; she had forgotten, completely. Such mundane things as rings had found no place in that heart-to-heart confab.

She tried to muster up sufficient courage to go to Mystery and question her, but shrank from such a course, even though she realized that her peace of mind, her very happiness itself, depended upon setting her doubts at rest. Of course Winthrop had a right to do what he pleased with the ring after she returned it, but — Oh! she must know the truth, no matter how deeply it hurt!

While she hesitated in uncertainty, the telephone bell sounded. It proved to be Mrs. Porter herself, but her usually placid voice had such an excited ring in it as she urged the girl to "come over right away; I've got something perfectly wonderful to tell you!" that Marjory's eagerness caused her to scramble over the fence instead of going around. During the clamber the blouse front she was embroidering was gathered into a tight ball that failed to add to the freshness of its appearance, but the gratification of her curiosity demanded some sacrifice.

To her surprise Mrs. Porter hugged her ecstatic-

ally, then burst into tears and sobbed hard. Marjory had never before seen her easy-going neighbor in such a state. Was it because of Winthrop — of the renewal of the engagement? She was divided between curiosity and alarm, but the latter conquered; she rushed to the telephone and gave Dr. Guthrie's number before Mrs. Porter realized what she was doing. When she did, she snapped on the receiver again, leaving the Guthrie maid "helloing" frantically.

"No, dear, I'm neither sick nor crazy," she assured Marjory, "even though I may act like it. But then a person doesn't get a — Here! read this! Oh! I can't believe it! I can't believe it! but of course it must be true or he wouldn't say so, would he? Poor boy! poor boy!"

Marjory skimmed through the letter then sank back weakly on the couch. Over a million dollars! It was too good to be true. Like Mrs. Porter, she read the letter again, the latter watching intently the play of conflicting emotions on the young face. When the truth of the strange communication finally conquered her incredulity, she seized Mrs. Porter about the waist and whirled her around in a wild dance of exultation.

"Oh! What luck! What splendid luck! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Each exclamation was punctuated with an exuberant hug. Then her excitement calmed down as she saw the slow tears rising in the older woman's downcast eyes.

"Please forgive me!" she begged contritely. "I

— I forgot — him, poor fellow! It seems like rejoicing over death, almost, but I didn't mean it that way, truly I didn't."

"Of course you didn't, dear! And you scarcely knew Walter, did you? He was with us while you were away at boarding-school."

"Win has told me ever so much about him, though," Marjory began eagerly. "He says he was a brick, even if he was a solemn — er — not very gay, you know."

"Yes, I know. Walter had had so much responsibility and trouble, it made him seem more mature, more settled than most boys of his age; but a better principled fellow never lived. And so grateful! He was a year or two older than Win, you know, although they were in the same class; you see he missed school for a while after his father became an invalid and his help was needed at home. And to think that he died a millionaire! It seems almost incredible, doesn't it? It's hard to understand, when you remember how poor they were. Why the smallest fraction of such a fortune might have saved his poor mother's life; and oh! what comfort, what peace of mind it would have given to the father!"

"I'd like to be here when you tell the family," Marjory laughed. "It will be as good as a show — three shows really! Such a surprise!"

"I'm afraid it will be an unpleasant surprise to Mig." Mrs. Porter's tone was full of foreboding. "You know how set she is in her ideas. Ches calls her an 'unbloody anarchist,' she's so down on riches

or anything that savors of luxury. She'll try to make me refuse the money, I know, or at least to accept only a small portion of it."

"Refuse the money?" Marjory's voice was husky with horror. "Refuse a million dollars! Then she ought to be sent to Bellevue! Nobody but a lunatic would even suggest such a thing. I don't care if she is Win's aunt," she protested, in answer to Mrs. Porter's shocked face; "she needn't be foolish. You'll surely be firm, won't you?" she went on in a coaxing voice. "You owe it to the boys."

"And to the boys' future wives!" Mrs. Porter added with a humorous twinkle in her eyes. "Yes, I've heard the good news, and I'm so glad, dear, for both your sakes. I was afraid I was going to lose my dear daughter."

"But you don't need a daughter now; you have Missy."

Mrs. Porter's keen ears detected the wistful note in the girl's voice. Taking her into her motherly embrace she looked straight into the flushed face.

"Marjory, never say or even think that again. You are to be the wife of my first-born. You'll understand how much that means some day, please God! Why, when Win lay in his cradle, a little dimpled bunch, I used to dream of the day he would bring his wife home to me. Now that time is near and I'm content — more content than I can express to you. Win has always been a good son, and a good son makes a good husband, they say. I am thankful he has chosen so wisely."

"But Missy —"

"Surely, child, you don't begrudge what we've done for her! She was such a helpless little thing! And I couldn't turn a homeless kitten away. Look out there, dear, and see the truth of my words." She laughed and pointed to a large and varied assortment of cats sunning themselves upon the kitchen piazza. "Could I refuse shelter to a stricken waif like Missy? She's welcome to a home here as long as she needs one. And she's like a ray of sunshine about the house, too. Win's still trying to discover her identity. He's set his heart on restoring her to her people, but it's discouraging work."

"He's awfully fond of her, isn't he?"

"Indeed he is, but it's a brotherly fondness."

"But he gave her — my ring." Marjory winced as she whispered the confession, her head buried in the folds of the soft fichu.

"Surely not! There must be some mistake."

"No, there isn't! I saw it — in her top drawer — that day you sent me up for one of her collars, and — and she — she said he — gave it to her." Marjory's words came in short, sobbing gasps, as she laid bare the wound that was festering in her heart. "He asked — her — not — not to — sh — show it to — any one!"

"I don't understand this. It isn't like Win, unless he did it in a fit of pique because — Here comes Missy, now. I'll ask her about it."

It was a grotesque procession that advanced slowly up the walk. In a spirit of mischief Mystery had placed a tiny kitten on Bugs' back, holding it se-

curely with one hand while she urged the dog on with the other. Bugs' whole attitude was one of canine protest against such indignity. With tail between his legs he slunk up the path. Such treatment might have been expected from his master, who was an incorrigible tease, but from her! The brown eyes he raised to her face looked volumes of reproach and appeal, but Mystery ignored their message and urged him on. The kitten, meanwhile, had settled down contentedly, and was working her claws back and forth through his rough coat with evident enjoyment.

"This money will accomplish one good purpose," Mrs. Porter remarked quietly, as she and Marjory watched the procession disband at the top of the piazza steps, to the exuberant relief of the principal actor. "It will enable me to keep her with me, without the reproach that I am increasing our expenses in a way that is not fair to my family."

"Why, who — oh! of course! Mrs. Thorne! And Bess is just as bad. She's possessed with the idea, now, that Missy must have been a vaudeville dancer. It's dreadful the way she harps upon the immoral lives such people lead. I reminded her that to the pure all things are pure, but she only said 'Humph! not in New York!' She has a code of morals for each locality, evidently. Why, she even said that the motto of the 'Order of the Garter' was an exploded idea in this century. Isn't it dreadful to be so — so ugly?"

When Mystery was told the wonderful news, she put her arms around Mrs. Porter's neck and kissed

her lovingly, whispering: "You deserve it, every cent, and I am so glad, oh! so glad!"

After they had threshed the letter over again for her benefit, Mrs. Porter said quietly: "When did he give you that ring, Missy?"

"What did you say?" the girl asked, looking up in surprise.

"When did he give you that ring, dear?"

"What ring?" Mystery blushed and glanced at her hands involuntarily. "No one has given me a ring."

"But I saw it!" Marjory burst forth excitedly, angered at the evasion. "It's in your top drawer, in a box wrapped in dark green paper —"

"Oh! that! I forgot! I — I promised — I can't tell."

"But I must know, dear," Mrs. Porter persisted. "I wouldn't ask if it were not necessary."

Mystery shook her head; Chester had trusted her.

"I wouldn't urge you to break your promise, Missy, but it may cause serious trouble if you don't tell me all about it."

"You won't blame him, will you?" the girl questioned anxiously. "I love him dearly, and I gave him my word — Oh! please don't ask me to say any more until I have a chance to see him. I'll ask him to release me from my promise. If he does, I'll gladly tell you all about it. You understand, don't you?"

The girl's distress was evident, as was also her determination to keep her word to the giver of the ring. In spite of her gentleness she could be firm to

the point of obstinacy if she felt it was a question of right. Mrs. Porter knew this. With a quiet, "Very well. Let us know as soon as possible," she turned to Marjory with significantly raised eyebrows, urging her, silently, to drop the matter for the present. Marjory responded to the unvoiced command and took her departure, more deeply mystified than ever. Was Winthrop playing fast and loose with them both? It was not like him, yet there was the ring! And Miss Mystery's blush and that embarrassed glance at her ringless hands, had not escaped her jealous watchfulness.

Fortunately the harrowing uncertainty was of short duration. As soon as Chester heard of the tangle, he promptly claimed the trouble-maker and carried it to its original owner.

"Gee! but he was hot that morning!" he ended the story, an impish grin on his freckled face. "I'd let him stew a bit if I were you, Marjory. Make him think he's got to dig up another sparkler! Serve him right for such a display of temper. A man ought to have more self-control!"

He winked audaciously as he aired the familiar sentiments so often hurled at his own head by his staid elder brother. Marjory returned the wink with interest; the hedge as a rival, caused her no uneasiness. The knowledge that "her ring" had never been given to another seemed to have a peculiar effect upon her; she wanted to laugh, and dance and sing. She even tried to vent some of her superabundant exuberance on her future brother-in-law, but he eluded her and made his escape. Then

Lorito fell a victim to her elation — Lorito, who detested having his feathers rumpled. The bird endured her caresses until endurance ceased to be a virtue, then he protested audibly.

"Cut it out! Cut it out, I say!" The angry croak was an unconscious imitation of his pet aversion, Chester, and Marjory laughingly desisted; but feeling that she must express herself in some way, she fell back upon the stolid Tekla — her sister-in-law was at a bridge party — until she, too, failed her by breaking into the midst of one of her rhapsodies in her expressionless way, with: "I tank I git my supper on now. I tank I not talk no more."

Marjory took the broad hint, and went up-stairs, apostrophizing the shining circlet as she once more slipped it upon the third finger of her left hand, in the words of the unemotional Tekla, but there was a thrill in her voice that was lacking in Tekla's.

"I tank I put you on now! I tank I not send you back no more!"

That evening, just before supper, Chester telephoned her. From the guarded tones in which he spoke, she judged that he did not wish his message to be overheard by any of the home folks.

"That you, Marjory? . . . Say! he's asked me to hunt for a little package he lost in the hedge. Lost, savez? Great, isn't it? There's five dollars in it for me if I find it."

"But, Chester —"

"Oh, I know, but look here, Marjory, you might help a fellow out. A fiver's a fiver, and I'm awfully hard up just now. I suppose you wouldn't be will-

ing to put the ring back just long enough for me —"

"Why, Chester Porter! Put my ring in that dreadful hedge again? Certainly not!" Marjory's voice was full of righteous horror at the mere suggestion. "But see here, dear, you really did find it for us. If you hadn't searched, some one else might have discovered it, and we would have been none the wiser. You kept quiet about it, too, and that was almost as good as finding it. I'll give you the five dollars — if — you — really — need — it!"

There was a laughing emphasis about the staccato of her last words that puzzled the boy. He could not know with what difficulty she had refrained from telling him the wonderful news that afternoon when he returned the ring. It was evident, from his request, that he was still in ignorance of it, but she felt that she had no right to tell; that privilege belonged to his mother, and her own knowledge of it was given confidentially. She wondered why Mrs. Porter had delayed the telling so long. She herself was fairly bursting with the desire to shout it aloud. It seemed that she could hardly wait to see Winthrop and talk it over with him.

"If I need it?" Chester repeated scornfully. "Say, Marjory, how'd you like to live on a dollar a month? And have to pay brigade dues out of it, too! Not much danger of extravagance, is there? Well, if you're silly enough to tell him everything you know, why go ahead!" The guarded tones had gradually become louder as the boy's indignation got

the better of him. "But he deserves to sizzle a bit. I'd make him buy a new ring, if I were you. You'd be one in, then. Do it, Marjory! Hide the old one until —"

"Until I come over to put it on again myself, sweetheart!" a deeper, manlier voice finished, to the accompaniment of sounds that betrayed a scuffle. "There! I've pinned the young rascal down! What shall I do to him, Marjory? You must pronounce sentence. He's convicted on a charge of unlawful extortion and conspiracy."

"Prisoner at the bar, stand up!" Marjory commanded in stern tones, entering into the fun with girlish glee and enjoying the sound of a renewed struggle that came over the wire. "I won't!" she heard in sulky defiance, quickly followed by an "Oh, yes, you will!" from Winthrop. "Go ahead, judge!" he added: "the prisoner's all smiling attention."

"I sentence you to receive upon the bare palm of your right hand, five hard, silver dollars! Perhaps I ought to say gold dollars in view of —" A tantalizing laugh ended her sentence.

"In view of what?" Winthrop questioned curiously.

"Don't you know yet?"

"No. What is it?"

"My lips are sealed — for the present. You'll know by and by. See that my sentence is executed immediately, won't you, Win? The prisoner deserves leniency, and you can afford it — now!" A mischievous laugh rippled forth. "And Win?"

"Yes, darling!"

"S-sh! Central might hear you!"

"I don't care, just so you hear, too. What were you going to say?"

"Come over as soon as you can and — and do what you said."

"What was that, sweetheart?"

"Oh, you know! — put the ring on for me," she whispered softly, earnestness conquering shyness. "It won't bring good luck unless it's put on by the right person."

"And am I the right one? Are you sure, you little weathercock? Will it be 'for keeps,' this time?"

"Indeed it will! Cross my heart, hope I may die if it isn't!" She quoted the childish oath tremulously, but the light that shone in her sparkling, dark eyes shines only after childhood days are over. It is the glow that comes to womanhood, and then only when it wears Love's crown.

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST EFFECTS

"Perplext no more with Human or Divine
To-morrow's tangle to the winds resign . . ."

It had been a long, nerve-racking day to Mrs. Porter. She awaited the return of her family with mixed feelings of eagerness to tell the great news and anxiety as to its reception, by one member, at least. That it would prove a welcome surprise to Winthrop and Chester was a foregone conclusion; that the surprise would be equally great, as far as Aunt Mig was concerned, was also assured, but the good lady had grave doubts as to its being a welcome one. She had lived with her sister-in-law all her married life, more than long enough to become well acquainted with her idiosyncrasies; hence she had no illusions as to how Miss Porter would receive the news.

There was a teachers' meeting after school, that afternoon; it was almost supper time before Miss Mig returned. As usual she made straight for her room to freshen up. She had no patience with the "Fluffy Ruffle" sisterhood. Their fripperies were an unknown tongue to her; if they held any appeal she never attempted to translate it. She was always

severely tailored; always immaculate. Her coat-suits of mannish mixtures were carefully fitted; no grime ever showed on her stiff white collars; no creases in her stiffly starched shirtwaists; belt and tie were what they should be and where they should be; her shoes were carefully polished, their heels as straight as when they left the manufacturer. To neglect any of these things would have been a greater sin, in her eyes, than to neglect the commandments. In fact the fourth one was frequently offered on the sacrificial altar; in Aunt Mig's gospel, cleanliness was not next to godliness, it was godliness!

"Aunt Mig's daffy on the subject!" Chester was wont to say. "Life's too short to be always cleaning up."

Winthrop and Chester had finished their fray at the telephone before Miss Mig appeared in the sitting-room. Mrs. Porter glanced at her sister-in-law's strong face almost apprehensively. As a young bride she had learned to know its every line of grim decision; the years had but added to their depth of cutting. Yet it was a handsome face, as she freely acknowledged.

With rare self-restraint she waited until they were through supper before communicating the contents of her morning's letter, save for the quiet announcement that she had received word of Walter Warren's death. They all expressed regret and sorrow, but seven years of absence without communication, does much to shatter youthful ties, and even Winthrop felt that his sympathetic platitudes were somewhat forced. Aunt Mig supplemented her regrets

for the man's untimely death by unhesitatingly ascribing it to his own foolish perversity.

"If he had stayed here and worked steadily instead of rushing around the world after will-o'-the-wisps, he'd have had a good position by this time. At least he'd have been settled."

Involuntarily the thought flashed through Mrs. Porter's mind that the poor fellow was settled enough as it was; then she chided herself sharply, shocked at her mental flippancy.

"But he wanted to make his fortune," she defended him.

"Fortune! Huh!" It was almost a snort. "Fortunes are not made in these days. All this rant about fortunes —"

"Gets on your nerves, doesn't it, Aunt Mig?" Chester finished the sentence for her, and received an indignant glare as a reward.

When they left the table, Mystery tactfully excused herself and sought her own room, feeling that in the conclave to follow, the family would be best alone. Winthrop started for the front door, eager to keep his word to Marjory, but his mother's voice detained him.

"Wait a moment, dear! Marjory will understand. You, too, Ches! I have something to — to —" Her voice trailed off into an unintelligible murmur. The excitement that was telling upon her long restraint became apparent in her manner. A spot of bright red burned in each cheek; she found herself trembling as though with a chill.

"What's up?" Chester demanded curiously.

"You look all in, mother; anything wrong? Are you sick?"

"No, dear. And nothing's wrong, but —"

"Unburden your mind, do, mother," Winthrop urged in teasing solicitude. "Whatever it is, it must be tremendously important to ruffle our placid, maternal ancestor thusly!" As he spoke he put his arms about the "maternal ancestor" and hugged her with old-time, boyish fervor. Even Aunt Mig paused in her perusal of the *Outlook,* whose dictum on all affairs, city, state, country, natural and supernatural, was her law, and surveyed her agitated sister-in-law expectantly.

"Walter left us — some money," Mrs. Porter said, finally.

"Walter? Walter Warren? The poor chap must have worked like the mischief to have any to leave." Winthrop's voice was full of admiration. "I know my 'estate' wouldn't make much show, just now, at all events. I call that pretty decent of him. Much?"

His mother nodded, her eyes brimming over with tears as she thought how little good the money must have done its young owner. "Over a million dollars!" she whispered in tremulous tones.

Three people stared at her open-mouthed. The picture would have been ludicrous had she been able to see the humor of it, but she was too intent on the communication she had to make to notice details.

"Not a million! You don't mean it!" Aunt Mig gasped.

"Yes, I do mean it — over a million! That

letter this morning,— you remember, Ches? — came from a lawyer in Australia —"

"Australia!" It was like a well-trained chorus.

"Yes, Melbourne! He says Walter left a will in which everything he owned is bequeathed to us."

"But a million dollars!" Winthrop's tone was full of incredulity. "How could he make such a sum as that? It — it seems — Speculation?"

"No, it was left to him, I understand, but by whom I can't imagine. It's thousands of acres of grazing land, and all kinds of stocks, and —" She paused, calm enough by this time to enjoy their surprise.

"Oh! go on! do!" Chester flung in, impatiently.

"A gold mine!"

"A gold mine!" Again the chorus in perfect accord.

"Yes. That is, an interest in one. Here's the lawyer's letter."

She passed it to Aunt Mig, but Chester, too impatient to await his turn, deliberately read it over his aunt's shoulders. Winthrop hesitated an instant, then with a muttered word of apology, shamefacedly followed suit. For a moment there was silence in the sitting-room. Mrs. Porter eyed her sister-in-law intently, but an absorbed "H'm!" was all the comment that lady vouchsafed.

The nephews amply atoned for their aunt's taciturnity, however. After recovering from the first shock, they viewed the situation from every possible angle, finding each one more to their liking than the one before. Winthrop was as outspokenly enthusi-

astic as Chester; both descanted glowingly upon the great change the inheritance would make in their lives. It was some time before they talked out their exultation, then Winthrop remembered that Marjory was waiting for him, and left to rehearse the situation with her, while Chester went up to his den to write to various sporting-goods houses for their catalogues of delights. When the door closed upon them, Mrs. Porter braced herself, mentally, in readiness for the delayed attack.

"She's too wise to scatter her shot," she thought, with a tinge of bitterness. "She's keeping it all for my defenseless head."

Not one word had escaped Aunt Mig's lips since her first non-committal murmur; all through the boys' enthusiastic canvass of the situation she sat lost in thought. This restraint, so different from her usual aggressive dominance, boded ill. But in spite of her preparation, the opening fire took Mrs. Porter completely by surprise.

"Of course the final decision does not rest with me," Miss Mig began thoughtfully, "but I hope to influence it to some extent."

"Influence it? How?" Mrs. Porter braced herself anew. This was not her first experience with Aunt Mig's methods of "influencing."

"I know several who really need the money —"

"Need the money?" Mrs. Porter repeated mechanically.

"And are fitted, you understand. Of course it would not do to consider any unsuitable person, no matter how great the need. I have one or two in

mind now, however; it won't be hard to dispose of the matter satisfactorily."

The speaker's coolness fairly took Mrs. Porter's breath away, accustomed as she was to her habit of taking the reins. To think that already she was compiling a list of deserving poor — beneficiaries in the proposed distribution of her inheritance! It was "Miggier" than ever before! There was an unwonted sparkle in her kindly eyes; she shut her lips in a way that boded ill to any beneficiaries, however deserving. But these wrathful signals were lost upon Aunt Mig, who was once more deep in thought, nodding her head at intervals, in grave approval. Evidently the list of deserving poor was growing to her entire satisfaction.

"Yes, I feel sure there'll be no trouble on that score. As I said before, though, I do not have the actual decision —"

"Oh! you don't! I'm glad you realize that." For once Mrs. Porter's voice verged on the sarcastic.

"Certainly I realize it, but I hope that my opinion will carry weight. You understand how I feel about it. I have at heart the good of all concerned. Since this has happened in such an unexpected way, I feel it my duty to —"

"You need not feel it your duty to do anything at all!" Mrs. Porter flashed forth indignantly. "This is my affair!"

"Your affair? But it concerns —"

"No, it does not! It concerns me — me — me!" The pronoun was forced through set teeth. "For once I intend to assert myself. I want you to

understand, Mig Porter, right here and now, that I propose to keep — this — money! All of it! Every dollar!"

"To keep this money?" Miss Mig repeated, staring at her sister-in-law in mystified amazement. "To KEEP it? Why —"

"Yes! to keep it!"

"But I don't understand." Aunt Mig's face was a study in perplexity. "You surely know how I feel —"

"I don't care a snap of my fingers for your feelings in this case; I'm considering my boys' feelings, and their wives — when they get them — and — and — the money stays right in this family." Then she broke down, utterly exhausted by her unwonted outburst, and burying her head in the arm of her chair, sobbed as she had not done for years.

"You're all done up!" Aunt Mig's tone was wonderfully gentle. She patted the bowed head with soothing touch. "No wonder, either! Why didn't you send over to school for me? It's been too much for you. You'll feel differently by and by."

"I'll never feel differently! I'm not going to give up the money," came sobbingly from the depths of the arm-chair.

"Give it up? Why on earth should you give it up, pray? Give up a million dollars? Who ever heard of such a thing!"

"But you've always — I thought you believed a fortune ought to be divided."

"Divided?" Aunt Mig's voice rose to operatic

heights on the middle syllable. "Certainly not, in a case like this. Are you crazy? Of course," she hedged suddenly, remembering that some of her utterances — mere glittering generalities — might have laid her open to such a construction, "there are cases — but this is different, entirely different. We don't intend to accumulate, certainly not! Give up a million dollars! Pff! I never heard any one voice such a Utopian idea."

"But you spoke of deserving people —"

"To take my position at school. My classes are at a critical point in the year's work. Even a million won't satisfy me if they put an incapable in my place and my boys and girls lose by it. Now that we're rich, and will live on a larger scale, I take it for granted that you'll need my help in managing the house and the servants."

"Servants?" Mrs. Porter echoed faintly.

"Certainly. Even if we secure a competent housekeeper there is still need of oversight. You see an inheritance like this brings responsibilities not to be shirked. I, personally, prefer an English butler, I think. They are so stolid and deferential — just like well-trained machines. Still they say the Japs make splendid butlers. Ever so many millionaires have them. Of course, the maids must be French."

"Good Lord!"

Mother Porter had been raised upon the commandments, and in her turn had dutifully instructed her boys in them, but the startled exclamation that escaped her lips brought no remorse in its train.

She stared at her sister-in-law with something akin to fear in her eyes.

"The letter leaves no room for doubt as to its authenticity," Aunt Mig went on, in her summing up. "And Walter was without a relative in the world, so there can be no possibility of other heirs to dispute our claim. I don't see why there should be the tiresome delay there usually is. It's all as clear as can be, to my eyes. We might as well plan the new régime at once. I feel sure poor Walter would wish us to enjoy his money. As soon as things are going smoothly here, I'll probably run over to London and Paris for a little trip. I've wanted to do the Mediterranean for some time. Travel is the broadest culture of all, I think."

Mrs. Porter sank back weakly, wondering whether her ears were playing tricks on her brain. Could this be Aunt Mig, the austere, the wealth despiser, the "near-socialist"? Had this unexpected turn of events affected her mind? She had heard of such cases. Or was she herself imagining the whole thing? Perhaps that was it; perhaps there was no fortune and never had been one. She pinched her arm vigorously, and rejoiced to find that it hurt. At this juncture Aunt Mig's voice once more penetrated her uneasy imaginings.

—"and I think I'll have some of my lingerie done in the French handwork they are using so much just now. It is dainty, and has a style all its own — rather a costly simplicity, I know, but that doesn't matter under the circumstances."

"But you always wear ribbed union suits," Mrs.

Porter ejaculated. "You've said again and again that they are the only sensible garments because they save time and money."

"They do." Miss Mig's tone was unruffled. "Union suits suited me perfectly just for that reason, but it's different now. One must adjust one's self to circumstances. And that reminds me: I suppose we'll build immediately, but until the new home is ready we might rent the Sylvester house. It's a splendid place for entertaining, and has beautiful grounds and a good garage, and —"

The rest of the advantages of the Sylvester property remained forever uncatalogued. At this point Mrs. Porter took the center of the stage. She rose to her feet, her eyes flashing, her whole form trembling with passion. The gesture with which she silenced the speaker would have done credit to a queen of tragedy. It had taxed her endurance to the utmost when Aunt Mig boldly shifted her ground on the question of the fortune, though she realized that this unexpected attitude simplified matters for her. Her sister-in-law's calm disavowal of her former principles, even in so trifling a matter as underwear, added another straw; and now this cool disposition of herself and her affairs; of the home to which she had come as a bride, every inch of which was dear to her from hallowed associations with her dead husband and the babyhood of her boys, was too much to pass unchallenged. Aunt Mig recoiled in dismay from the explosion which followed.

"Wear what underwear you please," she ended in the low, tense voice in which she had spoken

from the beginning: "or go without any, if it suits you; but understand, once and for all, that we stay here in our own home, fortune or no fortune!"

"All right!" Aunt Mig's tone was soothing in the extreme. "It was merely a suggestion, you know. I want to help you in every way possible, and it occurred to me that an up-to-date house would be necessary. We certainly can't live in style here." She emphasized her conclusion with a deprecatory wave of the hand towards the old-fashioned, home-like interior.

"Style!" Mrs. Porter repeated with scathing emphasis. "Will style make our home any more comfortable? Will it make the boys better, manlier? Will it help the good work here in St. George, or take care of the sick and needy? But you're welcome to all the style you want, Mig," she checked herself suddenly, "if it makes you any happier. You may have your 'runs' abroad; you may have a Hottentot butler, if you want one; you may get your underwear from Paris or Hoboken, for all I care — but style or no style, we stay — right — here!"

"Amen!" came a boyish shout from the doorway, as Miss Mig stalked out in speechless indignation. "Whew! Moth! You've missed your vocation; you'd make a sensation on the stage! George! You sent cold shivers up and down my spinal column when you spoke that way. But you're all right, and don't you forget it! This old shack's a pretty jolly place after all, and we can use the money in lots of better ways. Say, mother, there's room for a garage near the back gate. I've just

been measuring off the space. I've promised lots of fellows rides in our buzz-wagon, but I told 'em they needn't ask to run it. I'll do that part myself! Get a seven-passenger touring car, won't you? Then I can take some of the bunch down to Atlantic City and places like that. Of course you can have a little electric runabout for yourself, you know. Here comes old Win. Hey! What'd Marjory think about it? I'll bet she was mighty glad she made up with you in time; she'd hate to do it now, if she hadn't."

"You'd better put a curb on that tongue of yours, Kid! It'll run away with you some day if you don't. Marjory knew about it before I did. She said she couldn't have kept the secret much longer. We've been planning to get a small yacht. I'll join one of the yacht clubs, and we can invite the jolliest parties for week-ends during the summer, for dances at the club and short cruises. It's the best way to do the different coast resorts. You'll join us, won't you, mother? You may be a first-rate sailor for all you know."

Mrs. Porter was unable to speak. The fortune so unexpectedly cast at her feet seemed about to revolutionize her whole world. She felt that she was being run away with, and by tried family steeds at that! These airy allusions to trips abroad, and yachts and motors at home, made her head whirl.

"At this rate I'll 'do' Bellevue's psychopathic ward!" was the grim thought that flashed through her mind. Aloud she said wearily: "I — I'll have to think it over, boys. I'm too tired —" To

their genuine dismay, a burst of sobs finished the sentence. Both Winthrop and Chester were at her side instantly.

"Of course you're tired!" Winthrop agreed in soothing tones, patting her hair with gentle touch. Then he caught a glimpse of her haggard face and was smitten with remorse for his thoughtlessness. "We're perfect beasts, all of us, not to realize what a strain this has been for you. Get to bed right away, mother, do, or we'll have a case for Doctor Guthrie on our hands. We'll help you up-stairs. Come on, Kid! Let's make a basket! Mother hasn't had a ride for ages."

Before she could object had she cared to do so, Mrs. Porter found herself seated between her two stalwart sons, an arm around each neck. They carried her up-stairs with gentle care, and set her down in the great armchair before the cozy open fire which made her large room so cheerful.

"My team!" she murmured, patting each head lovingly. "A team that no million can buy!"

Then the boys set to work to render the little attentions they had so often shown her when they were younger, and household tasks had left her worn and tired, attentions that had fallen into disuse of late years. One unlaced her shoes and stroked her ankles, "to take out the tired," as Chester used to say; the other removed her combs and hairpins and let her beautiful silvery hair fall about her shoulders. She lay back in the great chair with a restful sigh, enjoying their ministrations as only a mother of grown-up sons can. It took her back

through the years to the time when they were her little boys and she was all-in-all to them both.

After they had made her comfortable, they draped themselves over the arms of her chair in the awkward way that boys, even grown-up ones, adopt, and the three sat together in familiar silence, gazing into the glowing depths of the fire, each seeing visions after his own heart. It was Chester who finally broke the silence. He burst forth into eager questioning on the subject uppermost in all their thoughts, but was promptly silenced by his older brother.

"Not to-night, Kid! Mother's all tuckered out. She don't inherit gold mines and million-dollar fortunes every day, remember. You tabulate those 'want-to-knows' of yours, and we'll take them up later. We've got all the rest of our lives to settle the disposition of that fortune."

"Poor Walter!" Mrs. Porter sighed. "It seems almost like rejoicing over his death, somehow, but of course we don't mean it that way."

"Of course we don't! Come on, Kid! We'll clear out, now, and let the mater go to bed."

With the good-night kisses they seldom omitted, the two departed, Winthrop pausing at the door long enough to say, with an assumption of stern authority: "You get right to bed now, mother, or we'll have you sick on our hands. Just put everything out of your mind and go to sleep! Good night."

"That's the ticket!" Chester enforced his brother's mandates. "Bed for yours, mother! Count sheep; that'll send you to sleep in a jiffy."

She smiled at their masterful tones. Like Cor-

nelia, these were her jewels; in her eyes they were invaluable. Would the new setting that seemed the inevitable result of the altered fortunes, add to or detract from their luster? She sighed as she realized, even thus early, the hitherto unsuspected burden of responsibility that wealth brings with it. Suppose luxury should prove the boys' undoing! Winthrop was pretty steady; she had little fear of its effect upon him. Besides, he had acquired an anchor that would prove efficient, she felt sure; for Marjory, with all her girlish love of luxury, was at heart both sound and sensible — a womanly woman. But Chester — ah! Already the lad's plans outran her conceptions. Could she check him? If not —

Tossing uneasily from side to side of the great, old-fashioned four-poster in which generations of Porters had slept, or tried to sleep, she made a resolute endeavor to turn her thoughts into other channels. But thoughts are stubborn things at best, night thoughts especially; they wear no guiding bit. Her unexpected inheritance and the changes that seemed destined to follow in its train, persistently routed every other subject. In desperation she resorted to Chester's expedient and began to count sheep industriously, but all to no avail. These sheep were not the usual timid followers; they were of bolder nature, and persisted in jumping over all boundaries, landing one by one in her own grazing lands in far-off Australia. Then she tried counting without the unruly sheep, but each count became a coin, a bright, shining, golden coin from her own mine.

At last, in sheer exasperation, she got up, and throwing her soft, gray eider-down robe about her, settled herself before the fire and let her rebellious thoughts run riot without bit or bridle. Anxious thoughts they were, too. In the clear vision that often comes with darkness, the fortune presented two aspects; if her family saw only the golden glow from one, she caught the steely glitter from the other, an inexorable glitter it seemed to her fearsome mind.

But finally the penetrating warmth of the fire lulled her excited imaginings. She dozed off to sleep, her last conscious thought: "I almost wish there was no fortune. Walter meant well, bless him, but we were so happy and contented before!"

And this was the woman who had sternly rebuked Aunt Mig at the mere suggestion of giving up the money! Truly, Mrs. Porter had also joined what Chester, in scathing reference to his aunt's change of base, termed "The Ancient and Honorable Order of Floppers!"

The next day found "the heiress" with brain clear, ready for action, once more her own quiet, capable self, prepared to cope with any conditions the new-found wealth might entail. She proposed to grasp her nettle firmly, that the ensuing sting be minimized. Possibly this attitude was another "flop," but if so, it was in the right direction, under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XI

AUNT MIG, DICTATOR

"A Blessing, we should use it, should we not?
And if a Curse — why, then, who set it there?"

The need of money makes many a criminal; the acquisition, many a fool. In the case of the Porters, the Warren wealth acted as a magnifying glass, bringing out unsuspected traits in their various natures. Strange to say, it was Miss Mig the democratic, the near-socialist, Miss Mig, whose strong convictions in regard to the evil of accumulated wealth nothing could alter — before the test came — on whom its effects were the most pronounced. In the expressive but inelegant phraseology of her younger nephew, she "flopped" completely!

History proves that there is a leader for each crisis; the crucial instant in the Porter annals found Aunt Mig not only ready, but anxious to act as pilot. Though it was only the family house-boat, it must be steered through the uncharted waters that lay ahead of it; for she disdained its safe harbor — nothing would do but they must put to sea at once. And steer she did with an energy, a forcefulness, a diplomacy that held the onlookers breathless, proving herself a helmsman of no mean ability.

The rest of the family tacitly acknowledged her

leadership, and obeyed her commands with all the promptitude of disciplined sailors. They were still dazed by the turn of events. They lacked her quick perception, her grasp upon the situation. They had not yet realized the stupendous power of their new wealth. Beyond seeing the immediate gratification of certain cherished longings, their minds went no further, but she was already deep in plans for the future; and first and foremost, she determined that the family must live up to its new responsibilities.

During this period no philippics fell from her lips. Wealth in the abstract was iniquitous — that she still firmly believed — but the Porter fortune was an exception; it would be used for the betterment of mankind, beginning, like charity, at home! Her point of view had shifted — it usually does when tuum becomes meum.

"We may as well accustom ourselves now to the new mode of living," she declared the next day, after remonstrating with Chester about certain uncultured expressions that liberally garnished his daily speech. "You cannot talk that way by and by."

And from that moment the words became her slogan, the war-cry of her strenuous campaign; not the sweet by and by of song and story, but the exacting régime soon to be established in the Porter household. Mrs. Porter rebelled at first, but ended by submitting tamely to her sister-in-law's dictum. On one question alone she stood firm; whatever sweeping changes the fortune might necessitate, they must be instituted in the old home. Shabby, comfortable old

furniture, easy-going, comfortable old habits might all go by the board; the house stayed as it was, and they stayed in it!

To the surprise of all, Aunt Mig was never ugly, scarcely aggressive, even, in regard to her reforms. She simply brought her pedagogical motto into play: the "repetition" that had been her sheet-anchor as a teacher she adopted in her dictatorship, patiently suggesting, explaining, correcting, and the subdued family, still dazed, tried to fall in with her wishes.

To Winthrop it mattered little; he and Marjory intended to set up a "smart" establishment of their own, some day soon, so Aunt Mig's campaign was directly in line with their plans.

To Mrs. Porter it mattered less. She felt that she was simply the steward chosen by Providence to administer the wealth which she regarded as a means towards an end. That end had nothing to do with the dictates of fashion, however, but she had taken her stand in regard to the old home: the other things were of little import. Still, she viewed her sister-in-law's strenuous efforts to change the family mode of living with kindly tolerance, ascribing them to the suddenness with which the great fortune had come upon them, and devoutly hoping that they would languish as the good lady grew more accustomed to the changed conditions. Pending that blessed consummation, she tried to follow her suggestions in minor matters, but without pronounced success. To refer to her shabby, comfortable parlor as the "drawing-room" seemed a good deal of a mouthful, but she managed it — at times. She also spoke of the

evening meal as "dinner" (when she did not forget); but it was beyond her powers to remain quietly seated until Katy announced the meal, and then march out formally, upon the arm of her oldest son. With the best intentions in the world she would find herself bustling about arranging the table, or summoning the others with a cheery: "Supper's on! Hurry, or the steak'll get cold."

More than once during those first days she unconsciously trampled upon her sister-in-law's preconceived ideas of fitness.

"Don't call out of the window to the huckster," Miss Mig pleaded almost tearfully. "And please don't order corned beef and cabbage for dinner; it's so — so ordinary."

"But it's extraordinarily good," Chester amended. "Can't you call it 'beef à la' something or other? Or say, make it an on-tray: that'll bring it up to a millionaire menu, won't it?"

There was bitterness beneath the boy's flippancy. He had neither Winthrop's ideal nor his mother's tractability to help him through the time of stress. He rebelled openly against the growing list of restrictions the new way of living promised to impose.

"Gee whiz! Aunt Mig's the limit! If she acts this way now, what on earth will she do when the money actually gets here! I don't mind being a millionaire," he conceded largely, "but I'll kick if she keeps this sort of thing up. Why, a fellow can't even think as he wants to!"

"Sh! sh!" his mother implored pacifically. "Your aunt would do anything in the world for

you, Chester; can't you do a little thing like this for her?"

"But it isn't a little thing," the boy objected. "It's prunes and prisms all the time — a regular continuous show. George! if rich people have to be as particular as all that, I should think they'd rather be poor. I would, I know! Can't you head her off, mother?"

Mrs. Porter shook her head. For years she had endeavored to "head her off," but she could recall no time when startling success had crowned her endeavor. And this particular flight of Aunt Mig's fancy presented greater complications than any of its predecessors; it was at a tangent, completely at variance with all preconceived ideas of her nature and principles. The fortune had found the flaw in an apparently impregnable armor. It recalled the traditional "putting a beggar on horseback," for though Aunt Mig was not actually headed for the realm of his satanic majesty, she was certainly doing her best to create an inferno all her own, in the Porter household — an inferno of insignificant restrictions that were irritating in the extreme. That very evening at "dinner," Chester brought down upon his unlucky head a long harangue upon the *noblesse oblige* of wealth, gently delivered, it is true, but none the less galling to the high-spirited lad. He endured it stoically, just as he formerly endured her philippics against riches. At its close, or rather, when he thought it ought to end, he gave vent to a sharp whistle, more to relieve his feelings than because he really wanted his dog.

"Here, old fellow! Come here, sir!"

"And that's another thing!" his aunt went on in patient expostulation. "That dog's name is —"

"An ear-sore, isn't it?" Chester interrupted sympathetically, as though anxious only to help her out. "Of course 'Bugs' isn't a suitable name now that we're going to join the up in G's, so I've changed it."

"Changed it?"

"Yep! The new name sounds ever so much richer. He likes it better himself, don't you, old boy? May I be excused, mother? Come on, Insecta Granda!"

Unseen by his aunt, he held a piece of cake just out of the dog's reach. Bugs rose at once and followed his master from the room. As soon as the door was closed after him, Chester indulged in a jig of exultation.

"Good for you, Bugsie! We fooled her that time, didn't we? What's in a name, anyhow? You'd be just as smart even if you were named Big Bug, but thank goodness you're not, and that whole million won't change you, so there!"

The week immediately following the receipt of the lawyer's letter was a busy one. Friends called up or rushed in at all hours, eager to learn the truth of the Aladdin-like tale that was traveling around the suburb. More than one neighbor, thinking of the monthly manœuvers necessary to make the pile of receipts equal the pile of bills, remembered, with a sigh, that to her also had been given the opportunity to befriend the lad so suddenly deprived of a home;

but the regretful "if" that rankled in their minds did not make them begrudge Mrs. Porter her good fortune. They felt that she deserved it, that seldom had fate dealt so fairly.

Aunt Mig usually sought her own room after school; her time was too precious to be wasted upon tea and callers. But the day after the news of the fortune spread abroad, she hurried home and appeared among the ladies gathered in the parlor, a picture of gracious hospitality. She answered questions, gave voluble explanations, and referred to plans for the future in a large way which rendered her hearers breathless. That she considered the bequest a family affair was evident at all times. Through it all, however, there was no faintest tinge of patronage, or of the superiority that wealth is prone to arrogate unto itself. Mrs. Porter, watchfully alert, relaxed her vigilance after the first few minutes; however much the fortune might have changed Aunt Mig's avowed principles, it had not made her snobbish. Even as this comforting assurance flashed through her mind, she heard her cordially urging the ladies to stay to tea, and a flicker of amusement appeared in her eyes, as she remembered Mig's distaste for afternoon affairs of the "giggle, gabble, gobble, git" variety, which she had hitherto branded as a silly waste of time.

Though the informal gathering happened to take place upon her busiest day, Katy arranged the tea-tray with painstaking care. She was a hospitable soul and delighted in company, but on this occasion her delight was changed to distress by a conversation

she overheard as she carried the tray into the parlor.

"As soon as we get the house remodeled —" Aunt Mig was beginning, when one of her listeners interrupted.

"Why, I distinctly understood Mrs. Porter to say that she intended to make no changes."

"So she thinks now, but she'll feel differently by and by. She'll realize the need of more ample quarters and an adequate staff of servants. I myself prefer French maids. The French are so deft —"

Katy set the tea-tray down with a bang and hurriedly left the room. Surprised at such conduct from her dependable handmaid, Mrs. Porter followed. She found the girl crouched before the kitchen table, her head buried in her arms, sobbing her heart out.

"Why, Katy! Are you sick? What's the matter? Did you burn yourself?"

"It's my heart that's burnt!" the girl replied, with a fresh outburst of woe. "After all these years, too, ma'am! Oh! but it's hard to bear, sure an' it is!"

"What is hard to bear?" Mrs. Porter urged patiently. For ten years she had been friend as well as mistress to the warm-hearted, impulsive Irish girl, and her distress touched her heart. "Have you had bad news?"

"That I have, ma'am! The worst news of all! An' to think that I'm to go because —"

"To go? To go where?" Mrs. Porter was genuinely mystified.

"To go away — from here — ma'am!" Katy gulped as she put the awful fact into words.

"But why should you go away? Are you dissatisfied?"

"That I am not!" came the decisive reply. "But I've got a leave because I'm not deaf, ma'am!"

"Because you're not deaf?" Mrs. Porter stared at the girl as though she thought she had lost her senses. "Not deaf? I don't see —"

"Neither do I, ma'am, but them's the very words Miss Mig said, ma'am. I heard 'em as plain as day. As if I ever tell outsiders anything I hear! Anyhow they ain't nothin' goes on in this house but what could be told to the winds of heaven. Why, Mis' Porter, honest to God I'm as deaf as I can be when it comes to hearin' anything I hadn't ought a hear. An' I'm dumb, too — as deaf an' dumb as any French maid."

"So Miss Mig wants a French maid, does she? Well, she's welcome to one, but I want an Irish maid, Katy, and I believe I'm still mistress, fortune or no fortune. Put all this nonsense out of your head at once. Your place is here with me as long as you care to keep it."

"That'll be forever, ma'am!" Katy's wide smile shone through her tears with true rainbow effect, and the matter was settled.

But there were a hundred other things in far from that blissful condition, as the heiress of the Warren million discovered to her dismay. The next few weeks were not peaceful. A dozen times a day she was forced to enter the lists or tamely submit to

sweeping changes that meant the loss of much that made life dear to her. In cases like replacing the faithful Katy or giving up the home that had been hers all her married life, she stood firm as a rock, but in lesser issues Aunt Mig won without a struggle, just as she had done for years, not altogether on account of her strong, unbending will — Mrs. Porter could be equally strong if it were a question of principle — but for the sake of peace in the family. Chester was boyishly outspoken in his contempt; he wanted his mother to assert herself.

"Gee whilliken! Just listen to Aunt Mig, will you? And to think that she used to preach the simple life by the hour! She's on the other side of the fence now, all right. And I'll bet you all the rest of those long-haired, red-flag wavers'd be exactly like her if you gave 'em half a chance. Just mark a bag of gold with their names and jiggle it before their eyes, and see whether they'd howl about dividing it! They'd fall all over themselves grabbing for it! Huh!"

And in truth the boy was right. Miss Mig did present a study in contrasts just at this time. Her old brusqueness of manner had slipped off like a garment; she became all graciousness, in spite of the vigorous campaign she was waging. Old family friends began to think that they had never understood her; that her blunt, sarcastic speeches had been figments of their own imagining. They had always respected her for her sterling worth, even though they winced when her barbed shafts found joints in their armor, but now that her bow and quiver were

laid aside, their respect became genuine affection. They reproached themselves for having failed to discover her charm earlier.

"She'll be a spender, though, that's certain," one of them remarked in confidential conclave; "but the money hasn't gone to her head any more than it has to Mother Porter's, and I'd like to see the fortune that could change her in any way."

And Miss Mig was a spender — but not of the Warren wealth as it happened: it was her own precious horde, the fruit of years of strenuous self-denial, that was being ruthlessly put into circulation. And though the money did not go to her head figuratively, it did, literally. Up to this time her head-gear had been chosen chiefly for its utility, though it seemed to the unprejudiced observer that it must have been for its ugliness; but at the end of the month, when she gave her classes into other hands and became a lady of leisure, she blossomed forth like the rose. Her customary hat, a small, plain gray, ready-to-wear felt, far from becoming, was promptly discarded, its place being filled by a large befeathered creation of black velvet for afternoon wear, and a dainty toque of violets for evening. Her dress kept pace with her hats. The severe gray mixture retired in favor of a handsome black corduroy street suit, while a violet crêpe-de-chine with yoke of soft écru lace kept the flowered toque in countenance.

Even the simple tub gowns formerly donned for Saturday and Sunday mornings were no longer in evidence; in their place a fetching negligée of soft

black silk trailed its swirling length after her as she swept about the house looking the grande dame to perfection. Mrs. Porter watched her furtively, filled with wonder at the transformation — such a handsome butterfly had the fortune evolved from the colorless cocoon. Winthrop was open in his admiration of this new aunt, and even Chester grudgingly acknowledged her charms.

"Miss Tailor Made's become Miss Fluffy-Ruffles," he confided to Marjy. "She's a beaut, too! You'd think she was a duchess, honest, you would! And say, she's not half bad in other ways, either, when she lets up on that confounded style she harps on. She's sort of softer, you know, and — oh, different!"

When Doctor Guthrie saw her for the first time after the transformation, he stopped short and stared in undisguised amazement.

"By Jove! She's stunning in that get-up! Perhaps —"

He left his surmise unfinished, wondering inwardly whether the severe gray of her disposition had been permanently retired with her tailored suits. He had heard of her new graciousness, but had not yet come within its radiation. His previous experience had left him somewhat skeptical. To his surprise her image, tall, handsome, commanding, came between him and his work more than once during the ensuing week, but its mature charm appeared side by side with a vision of youthful beauty. Yet, in spite of the contrast, he realized that the years since his proposal had dealt lightly with her. She was hand-

somer as a woman than she had been as a girl, and this new mantle of graciousness added the one touch needed to perfect her womanhood. If she were willing to give up her chosen work — the work that had stood in the path of his happiness, years ago — for the sake of the Porter fortune, might she not have done so for his sake, had he persisted? But that was past and done with. He had accepted his dismissal as final, resenting it fiercely, it is true, and now — well, the vacant niche in his heart was filled with another image. The last few weeks had changed things for him, forever.

"No fool like an old fool!" he scourged himself mentally, at the same time reveling in his folly with a joy that mere youth could not comprehend.

Ever since the day of the informal tea, Katy had kept a watchful eye on Miss Mig, anticipating her wants as far as possible, and making silent note of each new word or idea, with the dim hope that though she was unfortunate enough to be in full possession of her faculties she still might cultivate the desired "deafness." Far from resenting the extra work the last few weeks had put upon her, she seemed to glory in it. She was ironing busily, one afternoon, singing as she worked. Suddenly Miss Mig appeared in the doorway. Katy stopped, with iron suspended.

"Kindly put my lingerie in my room before evening, Katy."

"Yes'm, I will, ma'am. Where'll I find it?" she added, after a moment's thought.

"Where will you find it? Why, on the clothes-horse, right under your nose." Aunt Mig spoke on

the spur of the moment, forgetting for once, the gracious elegance that had been hers ever since the family's impending rise.

That evening Katy the adaptable put her head in at the parlor door, then started back guiltily and tried to give the knock recently prescribed by the dictator; but as both her arms were piled high with garments, she compromised by a deprecatory cough.

"I'll be takin' up the clothes now," she informed Mrs. Porter, in answer to her inquiring gaze. "Shall I put the boys' lingerie in the sewin' room, ma'am? There's some buttons an' straps that'll need fixin'."

Truly at this period the Porters might well have echoed Mrs. Ruggles' words preceding the wonderful dinner-party to which her nine "childern" were invited: "It's awful bothersome to stan' round an' act stylish!"

As the weeks went by, Miss Mystery grew more and more bewitching. The tiny form rounded into healthful curves. The twinkling dimples, the wondrously clear complexion with the sensitive color coming and going, the long, curling dark lashes that rested against their fair background, or flew up to disclose the deep blue eyes, all made a fascinating study in feminine allurement that was not lost upon masculine St. George. "A beauty," was the concensus of opinion, especially among the men of the younger set. Even the women pronounced her "pretty."

Dr. Guthrie gloated over each sign of renewed health with almost the feeling of creation. Had she

not been a senseless, soulless clod until his knowledge, his care breathed into her the very essence of life? While not the sculptor, was it not he who had given the awakening touch? During all these weeks he had supplemented Winthrop's efforts to discover her identity, with a tireless determination that surprised even himself. He spared neither time nor money in his self-appointed task, but his vigorous measures met with as little reward as had Winthrop's. As a last resort he had made a thorough canvass of the private asylums and public institutions, not only in New York but in adjacent towns and cities. His search was similar to that of the timid woman peering fearfully under the bed; his satisfaction at the lack of results was equally great.

Matters were at this stage on the day when Mystery chanced to meet him at the ferry and he offered to take her home in his car, dismissing his astonished chauffeur with a brief word.

"I have some spare time on my hands just now," he explained, as she hesitated in uncertainty. "Might as well drive you home as not. Shall we go up over the Serpentine Road first? The view will be perfect, it's so clear to-day."

"I'd love to, if you really have the time. There's a queer foreign ship off Quarantine. I caught a glimpse of it from the ferry-boat and I'd like to see it closer. Are you sure it won't rush you too much, afterwards?"

"Quite sure. Tuesday's my off day, you know."

"But this is Wednesday!"

"So it is! So it is! But you see, er — to-day's

an off day, too. People are keeping hopelessly well this fall. It's very discouraging, very!"

Mystery laughed and refrained from further inquiry, quite content to take his word for it. Possibly the desire on the doctor's part, to fill in this unoccupied section of his usually busy day accounted for the lingering way in which he settled her in the luxurious motor and tucked the great bearskin robe — mute witness to his prowess as a hunter — about her; possibly it was only his anxiety to defy the keen autumnal winds sweeping in from the outer bay. Mystery neither knew nor cared. She was genuinely fond of him, not only on account of the great debt she knew she owed to his professional skill and preseverance, but also on his own account.

It was not until they were flying through the grounds of the Country Club on their way back to St. George that the doctor opened fire. Even then it was only a tentative shot, to locate the position of the enemy, as it were.

"Look here, little girl," he began gently, "pardon me if I seem to be meddlesome, but have you thought about the future at all?"

"The future?" she repeated, her blue eyes wide with surprise. "Oh, yes, indeed! My future is settled."

The man winced at her words. So he was too late, after all! But perhaps she referred to her chosen work. He grasped at the frail straw. "You mean the kindergarten work?" he managed to ask, his lips so dry they made speech difficult.

"Oh, no. That's a thing of the past. I'm al-

most sorry — I love children you know — but this is something ever so much pleasanter."

"Pleasanter?"

"Yes — a home! I've promised, and I'm so contented and happy," she added shyly.

Mentally apostrophizing himself as a laggard, the doctor set his lips and apparently gave his undivided attention to his motor, but his thoughts were busy. If he had only spoken in time! But if he had, could he have rivaled Courtland with that splendid physique and handsome face of his, above all, his youth? Ah! that was the rock! He decided, with grim determination, to probe further.

"If — if you had not promised — could you — could I —"

Mystery turned to him in surprise; was this stammering, flushing creature the strong, assured doctor she reverenced?

"If I had asked — in time — what would you have answered?"

"Asked? Asked what?"

"Asked you to be my wife."

"Oh!" The amazed blue eyes looked up into his for one startled instant, then fell before his steady glance, but he had seen enough to know that his words took her completely by surprise.

"Would you have consented, Missy?" he persisted, realizing that the question was not fair to her, yet lacking the power to leave the matter unsettled. "If you had not promised Courtland, I mean."

"Promised Courtland? Promised him what? I haven't promised Mr. Courtland anything."

"But you said —"

"I said I promised Mother Porter to give up the kindergarten work and stay at home with her; that's what I meant, at least."

"Will you marry me, Missy?" The doctor spoke in low, even tones, but his heart seemed to pound harder than his motor. "Do you think you could love me —"

"I do love you — dearly — but — Oh! don't you understand? What am I? Who am I? How could I bear to risk bringing disgrace to — any one?"

"Disgrace? Nonsense! Disgrace could never touch you! I love you — Mystery Porter — just as you are. I don't care a snap of my finger for what you were! That's over and done with. What you are satisfies me."

"But suppose my family were — suppose I were not well-born — were a — Oh! no! no! it's impossible!"

"If there were no such consideration could you love me enough to marry me, Missy, or is there some one else?"

The girl's face flamed. She averted her eyes without replying.

"Forgive me, dear. I have no right to ask such a question. Remember, child, that I am your friend now and always. We'll reverse the usual order," he added, with an attempt to speak lightly. "I'll be a brother to you — a good, kind, protecting brother, please God!"

The doctor was not alone in his willingness to risk

the unknown for Miss Mystery's sake. By this time it had become patent to the dullest observer (and St. George had fewer than the average) that Arthur Courtland had also fallen a victim of the little god: that Cupid's arrow was too deeply imbedded in his manly heart to be dislodged by prudent cautions or prescient warnings. He made no effort to disguise his wound; rather he gloried in it. Yet in spite of this, in spite of the fact that over suburban tea-cups and even at the bridge tables, his "infatuation" had been the absorbing topic for some time, Mystery made a strenuous effort to ignore it. She had come to look upon herself as one set apart from love and marriage. The mystery of her life up to the time she arrived at the Porters seemed to rear itself into an impregnable barrier, shutting her away from womanhood's sweetest experiences. She felt that she could go to no man with those darkened pages of her life unlightened. If she rebelled against so barren a fate, she never voiced her protest.

But for Courtland no such barrier existed. When it was pointed out to him by officious friends ever ready to rush in where angels fear to tread, he hotly refused to see it. When Mystery herself expatiated upon its solidity and took refuge behind it, he began to hammer away, using as his battering-ram the most effective weapon in Cupid's armory: "I love you!"

"I know you don't love me as I do you, but it will come, darling; it must!" he pleaded. "Such love as mine is bound to win. Oh, Missy, say you care for me. Say it, darling! Don't be cruel!"

"I do care for you, Arthur," she whispered, "but not — not in — in that way. Something seems to hold me back. I don't dare let myself — I — I'm afraid. I can't conquer the feeling that I must not marry — any one. I've tried, but I can't do it!"

A wail of distress was in her voice; her renunciation cost her something. To her own heart she acknowledged that it would not have been hard to love this big, splendid fellow, as clean in his life as he was in his appearance.

"It's this confounded gossip that has gotten on your nerves," he exclaimed irritably. "Why can't they let a man arrange his own future? If they say anything more —"

"Then they have said something to you!" she interrupted. "I knew they would and — sh!" as he broke in hotly. "They are right, Arthur! Think of those shrouded years of my life. How do I know who I am, or what I am? I may have been anything — an idiot, even! This life now is a reincarnation, but before this — Oh! I must find out; I must! I must! I cannot bear this uncertainty forever! I wonder it doesn't kill me."

"What uncertainty?" he demanded bluntly. "What is there to worry about? I'm not in love with you as you were. I'm in love with you as you are now. Whatever you may have been before — and it could only have been sweet and lovely — has nothing to do with us, now. Don't you see that?"

"But don't you see that I cannot let you sacrifice yourself?" she pleaded. "Suppose I find out, later, that I am not well-born, that I am a — oh! I

can't say it! Or suppose I should lose my memory again? I did once. It might happen again. Don't you see that it would ruin your life?"

"I confess I'm obtuse," he replied loftily. "I love you, because you are you, not for your family or anything you may have been. As to your memory — neither lightning nor bricks strike twice in the same place! I know you don't love me now, Missy, not as I love you — you wouldn't hold out against me, if you did — but you like me. You surely like me, don't you?" There was an anxious note in his voice.

"I do like you, Arthur, oh! ever so much, but —"

"Then I won't give up," he interrupted stubbornly. "I'll never give you up until you come to me and tell me there's some one else you love more."

Such persistence seemed bound to conquer. At any rate it was not long before rumors of an engagement between the two were rife. When they reached the doctor, he went on his rounds looking like a masque of gloom. More than one patient sorely missed his bluff good-humor. But after a day or two he made an effort to throw off the oppression, to rejoice in her joy. He was only human, however; so when in answer to the congratulations he tried to offer heartily, Missy herself confided to him that there was no actual engagement; that while she admired and respected Arthur, she could not give herself unreservedly, as a girl in love should, the confidence lightened his gloom considerably. He decided to bide his time. Hope again became his

companion. Admiration and respect were not the serious rivals he had feared to find. He once more considered himself in the race — love against love, his rival's youth eliminated from the contest.

CHAPTER XII

THE CUP AND THE LIP

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes — or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,
Lighting a little hour or two — was gone.

Mrs. Porter awoke one morning a week later with a feeling of oppression heavy upon her. Life had suddenly become complex, a problem without a solution, or with one so involved it was beyond her capabilities. And it had always seemed so simple, so adjustable, before! With an impatient sigh she tried to shake off the sense of responsibility that was galling her. Did other rich people feel it, she wondered? She thought over the moneyed ones of her acquaintance — not a long list — and decided that outwardly at least they bore their burdens lightly.

"If only Mig and the boys would be content to let things go on as they are! Why don't people know when they are well off?" she muttered aloud irritably, the unruffled placidity with which she usually began her days a thing of the past.

All during breakfast Aunt Mig held forth on the changes in their manner of living that would be absolutely necessary now that they were people of means. To her harassed sister-in-law they seemed

to embrace pretty much every habit and custom of the whole family.

"Aren't we quite comfortable as we are?" she asked shortly, goaded beyond endurance by the interminable list.

"Comfortable? Certainly, but no one lives as we do except plain, old-fashioned people."

"What are we, pray?" Mrs. Porter fairly snapped out the question. Miss Mig diplomatically ignored it, and went on.

"People expect a certain style from us now. They have a right to expect it, under the circumstances."

Katy entered with the eggs at that moment. In her eager interest in the all-engrossing topic she forgot herself completely.

"I suppose you'll be goin' to the Church of the Extension now, won't you? It's lots more stylish than the Reformed."

Winthrop choked audibly and raised his napkin to his mouth to hide his laughter.

"Katy's twisted," Chester explained in matter-of-fact tones. "She means the Church of the Ascension. You bet I won't go there, style or no style. Our Sunday-school class is way ahead in stars for being on time. It means hustle, let me tell you. I don't see why nine-forty-five comes so early on Sundays; it's late enough other days."

"That's a puzzle that has racked older and wiser brains than yours, my dear brother," was Winthrop's patronizing reply. "It's twin sister to 'Why does that tired feeling always pick out Sun-

days?' Better give it up, Ches! Why subject that gray matter of yours to such a strain?"

"Oh, dry up!" the boy muttered under his breath, goaded beyond endurance by the teasing tones. Then to cover his slip, he began to enumerate a long list of things absolutely essential to his well-being, ending with the question: "Say, mother, when'll I get my allowance?"

"Why, Chester!" Her surprise was evident. "Haven't you always had an allowance?"

"Pshaw! What's twenty-five cents a week! You don't call that anything, now, I hope. Why, I ought to get five dollars at least. You see the fellows make me stand treat because we're rich. George! I owe a pile already."

"What?" Three voices exclaimed in unison, all in accents of incredulity.

"Sure thing! Can't treat on nothing, can you?"

"You — owe — whom?"

Chester stared at his mother in genuine dismay; never had she spoken so sternly before.

"Why, pretty much everybody. Oh, you know — the druggist, and Finley's and —"

"Finley's?"

"Yep! I ordered two carriages and took the crowd down to the Inn. They made me treat 'em to everything in sight, almost. A fellow can't be stingy when he's got the money."

"But you haven't!" Mrs. Porter's voice was low and tremulous. She shivered with nervous dread as she spoke. Mystery reached under the table and laid her hand softly upon the clenched ones, filled

with sympathy for her distress. In a flash she saw with the mother's eyes, and pitied her from the bottom of her heart. This sympathy between them had grown stronger and stronger as time went by. The girl loved and reverenced her foster mother, and Mrs. Porter leaned more and more upon her for daughterly help and companionship.

"You haven't a cent in the world," Mrs. Porter went on, in tense tones, with the feeling that she was facing a situation with which she was unable to cope.

"Guess I've got as much right to spend that million as any of the rest of the family," Chester retorted in sulky defiance. He was really frightened at the storm his careless words had brought down upon him. "A tempest in a tea-pot," he mentally characterized it, and blamed himself for "giving the snap away!" Then his eye fell upon his aunt's stylish corduroy suit — she was going to town immediately after breakfast — and he added aggressively: "Humph! Aunt Mig's begun on it already; she's a regular Fifth Avenue swell lately."

"Chester!" The word was an explosion. "Do you think for one instant that I bought my gowns with your mother's money? Do you? Answer me!"

"I don't know. Anyhow, you never dressed like that before."

"Of course not! I never dared to break into my savings for fear —" She broke off abruptly.

"For fear of what, Aunt Mig?" Winthrop questioned.

"Oh, nothing special; the money might have been needed for more important things than fripperies, that's all."

"Anyhow, Win's spending the money, or he's going to," Chester went on in his own defense. "He's already ordered a big touring car. I suppose he got that out of his savings, yes, I don't think!"

It was Winthrop's turn to flush in embarrassment. He turned upon the informer wrathfully.

"You attend to your own affairs, Kid, and I'll attend to mine, do you hear? I rather guess —"

"This is my business, Win," his mother interrupted with quiet decision. "If the first result of the fortune is to tempt my sons to spend money when they have none, I shall rue the day I ever received it."

"But it's all in the family, mother," Winthrop protested, in injured tones. "Of course the Kid had no right to —"

"Neither had you, Mr. High and Mighty!" Chester retorted. "You must think this is England, but it isn't. The oldest son here don't amount to a row of pins more than any other son, so there!"

"That will do, Chester! Even if the money is 'in the family' that doesn't justify either of you in spending more than you have." In a flash she saw the brink upon which her boys were standing and determined to be firm, at no matter what cost to herself.

"But you've got it," was the boy's grumbled extenuation, "so what's the difference?"

"There's a decided difference, Chester. You

have no more right to spend a penny without my permission than you have to spend money belonging to Mrs. Banker or Mr. Durbar, or any other rich person here in St. George."

"Whew!" Chester whistled involuntarily. Such stern doctrine on his mother's lips took him by surprise. To the lad's ignorance it smacked of stinginess. "You might expect some people to be tight-wads but I never thought my own mother would be one of them, I'll be darned if I did!" he growled under his breath.

"And you forget that I have not actually received the money yet. Of course it's sure enough, but —"

"Sure it's sure!" Chester interrupted. "As sure as death and taxes! Such a fuss over a few dollars! I don't suppose I owe over twenty-five altogether. What's twenty-five dollars, pray! And what's the good of money if it isn't to spend, I'd like to know. I —" he broke off short in his easy-going gospel. "Hello! There's an auto stopping at the gate."

"Who is it?" Aunt Mig asked, rising from her seat and going to the window. "I wonder why people that are hunting for anybody always stop here?"

"Why wouldn't they stop when they see such a handsome lady looking out?" Winthrop demanded, putting his arm about his aunt's waist and kissing her boldly. In truth he would have welcomed any interruption at that time, whether automobile or ash-cart; the latter, for preference, as the former was a tender subject for them. He was feeling decidedly

ashamed of himself. He had intended to speak to his mother before buying a car, but when he went to one of the manufacturers to look them over, he had met an old college chum there and had been unable to resist the delight of ordering in his presence.

"I guess it's the new car Win won't get!" Chester chuckled with aggravating emphasis, skilfully ducking under his brother's outstretched arm as he spoke. "I'll go out and tell them to take it right straight back because he's dead broke!"

As he dashed out, a lady left the car, and after an inquiring glance at the house and grounds, swept up the path towards the front door. Chester answered the bell. A moment later he returned to the dining-room.

"She wants to see you, mother. Gee! She's a corker! Snappy black eyes, and black hair, and dressed! The Queen of Sheba'd have to take a back seat, sure she would. Just wait until you see her. She's a picture postal for fair!"

"Stop your nonsense, Ches!" his mother commanded. She was putting the finishing touches to the cup of coffee she had just poured. Aunt Mig had left for town. She had become an inveterate shopper of late. "Who is she? What does she want? Couldn't you direct her?"

"She asked for you. Says she must see you personally, on very important business. She wouldn't give her name. I asked her."

"A book agent, I suppose, or some one wanting a subscription. Tell her I'm busy and can't see her. You go, Missy!"

"Nixie!" Chester insisted, blocking Mystery's progress with outstretched arms. "She wants you. No book agent about her. She looks like —"

"They never look like it." Mrs. Porter spoke almost irritably; the morning's disclosures had tried her sorely. "The last one was elegantly dressed. She sent in her card and stayed an hour and a half. She carried her books in a pocket in her petticoat, poor thing! I can't see any one this morning, Ches. I — I'm not feeling quite —"

"But she's not a book agent, I tell you," the boy persisted, "petticoat or no petticoat. Book agents don't come in automobiles."

Nevertheless he left the room with his mother's message but returned almost immediately, quoting: "Kindly request your mother to see me at once on a matter of greatest importance to us both. I have come a long distance for the sake of this interview."

"Very well." Mrs. Porter's tone was resigned as she rose from the table. Her face still wore a troubled expression. At the door she turned for a last word of admonition. She spoke to Chester, but her words were meant for Winthrop, too. He reddened guiltily.

"No more spending, Ches! Not one penny extra, without my consent! Don't forget, now!"

The parlor door was almost shut when Winthrop went into the hall a few moments later, but he heard the visitor's voice in uninterrupted monologue. At times it rose to an excited pitch, and once the recital was broken by a burst of heart-rending sobs.

"The story of her life, I suppose," he thought

carelessly as he pulled on his gloves preparatory to his sprint for the ferry. "Trust people to follow a fortune! Guess the mater'll be over-run with cranks as soon as it's well known. Bless her heart! she'll be an easy mark —" He stopped short: she had not played the part of an easy mark that morning. The remembrance of the scene at the breakfast table brought a hot flush to his face.

He opened the front door and saw the automobile still standing at the curb, it's trim, leather-clad chauffeur pacing restlessly up and down the pavement.

"Guess I've got another guess coming. Beggars don't arrive in cars like that; it's a crack-a-jack!" An envious sigh ended his words. Then he caught sight of Marjory standing expectant at the window. Raising his hat he started towards her, just as his mother called to him. With a wave of his hand he went in again and closed the door, leaving Marjory devoured with curiosity.

Mrs. Porter's voice, as she repeated the call, was scarcely recognizable, it was so agitated, so full of excitement.

"Win! Winthrop! Come here! I want you!"

He stepped to the parlor door with a haste that would have savored of curiosity — in a woman; in him it probably indicated a desire to be of immediate service. The two ladies were standing, facing each other. He saw at a glance that the visitor was young and handsome. She was a tall, finely formed woman with waving masses of glossy black hair showing beneath her veil-draped toque. Even the

pallor of the tear-stained face failed to disguise its charm. The perfect oval, the great black eyes with their fine, straight brows, the curved red lips, were all undeniably beautiful. Her dress was a soft, silky crêpe without a touch of color, but in spite of its somber hue it was the latest cry in fashion's catalogue. Both fit and finish proclaimed French handiwork as it clung to the splendid curves of her form or trailed its sinuous length about her when she moved forward with outstretched hand, to greet Winthrop.

"This is — is —" Mrs. Porter's voice died away in her throat. It was evident that she was making a strenuous effort at self-control. An instant's awkward pause followed, during which Winthrop gravely took the outstretched hand in his, his admiring eyes fixed upon the magnificent beauty before him. He was taken by surprise. For the moment it rendered him speechless.

"I — I want — to introduce —" Again Mrs. Porter's voice died away in her throat. She made an effort to go on but her words were unintelligible.

"I am Mrs. William Husted," the visitor declared quietly, raising her heavy white lids and allowing Winthrop to look through her great black eyes into the very depths of her soul, or so it seemed to his excited imagination. The glimpse vouchsafed him made him disregard her announcement. She repeated it, in low, vibrant tones of wonderful appeal.

"I am Mrs. William Husted. Pardon me — I forgot! You knew my husband as Walter Warren, I believe."

"What's that?" Winthrop recovered himself with a start. "You are —"

"Walter Warren's wife." Tears suffused the dark eyes as she spoke. "By the terms of Mr. Husted's will he had to take his benefactor's name, you know. We were married the morning we sailed for England."

"Sailed?" he repeated quickly. "We heard that he was dead."

"The lawyer told me he had given no details in his first communication," she explained quietly. "It is a long story, and he was uncertain whether the letter would reach you. The will my husband left — the one by which your mother inherited — was drawn up years ago; you might have moved to the ends of the earth before this."

"You say he sailed for England?" Winthrop questioned sharply. He was waking from the spell her beauty had cast over him. What her visit — her mere existence — meant to them was beginning to take shape in his mind. His thoughts were not enviable ones just at that moment.

"His lawyer has written you the whole story," she informed him in low, even tones. "The letter was posted soon after my interview with him. He waited only long enough to verify my claims. Undoubtedly you will receive it shortly. I thought it had reached you before this, so that you would be prepared, or I should have delayed my visit. It makes it harder —"

Even in the midst of his keen regret, Winthrop felt the spell of that wonderful, compelling voice.

"Don't talk of it now if it distresses you so," he urged kindly.

"I want to talk of it. I want you to know the whole story, but — it hurts —" A sob choked her voice; her eyes filled with tears, and she buried her face in her hands. After a moment she made a resolute effort to control her grief, and went on softly. "I cannot bear to think of it but — I must. We were mar — married that morning in the little church near my home. We were to sail at noon for England — Walter had important business there — and then for America. He longed to see you all. He often spoke of you, especially of 'Mother Porter' as he called her."

"The dear boy!" Mrs. Porter wiped her eyes hurriedly, explaining to her visitor: "He was like one of my own while he lived with us. He always appreciated everything we did for him. In fact he placed too much stress upon what he called his debt to us. I often think it was his longing to repay us that urged him to go in search of a fortune, instead of settling down to steady work here, poor laddie! Just think! not yet thirty, and his life-work ended!"

"What caused his death?" Winthrop demanded, almost curtly. "Was he sick long?"

She shook her head, her lips trembling in such a pitiful fashion that Winthrop immediately forgot the vanishing fortune in his desire to comfort her. After a moment's pause she went on bravely.

"We had engaged passage on one of the liners; it was to be our wedding-tour, you know. We had not intended to be married so suddenly, nor in such quiet

fashion, but when Walter found he had to go to England he refused to go without me. It happened to be during one of my mother's spells of comparative health — she had been an invalid for years — but even so, I hated to leave her alone. She took Walter's part, however; she wanted to see me safely married before — anything happened, I think now. They both became so urgent that I gave in, finally. Mother stood the excitement of the ceremony well, but collapsed after it was all over. I think only her great love and her anxiety to see me safe kept her up.

"We had just reached the pier when a messenger overtook us and told us what had happened. She had had one of her attacks of heart-trouble immediately after we left. The doctor despaired of her life, but thought that she might rally, partially, at least, so he sent for me. I couldn't leave her at a time like that, even for Walter's sake. It would have been utterly heartless. You see that, don't you? You see how I was situated?" The low tones became a plea, the great eyes were raised imploringly to Mrs. Porter's face, searching for assurance that her course had been justified. Mrs. Porter nodded gravely.

"There was but one thing for you to do under the circumstances," she answered in soothing tones. "Your mother's need came before your own happiness."

"I knew that I was right, but Walter's business in England was most urgent. An important transaction was pending that meant thousands of dollars to him, so I begged him to sail without me, promising to join

him there as soon as — as — I realized that if I left Australia then I might never see my mother alive again. Oh! it was hard! hard! A struggle between love for my husband and a daughter's debt to her mother; but finally duty won, thank God! Even in the face of what happened later, I still feel that I chose the right course.

"Walter agreed to my plan, unwillingly enough, poor boy, and we parted, he to sail alone, I to hurry to my mother's deathbed. But she rallied unexpectedly, and in three hours was out of danger for the time being, at least; yet that delay, only three short hours, cost me — oh! what did it not cost me! In my joy I telephoned the good news to the dock on the chance that the steamer might have been delayed. My message reached my husband just as they were preparing to cast off, but no inducement he could offer was sufficient to make the captain delay even half an hour longer. He had already held the steamer as long as he dared — he had the safety of his passengers to think of — so Walter left the ship to meet me. The message I sent so joyfully was the cause of his death." The last words were spoken so low her listeners had to strain their ears to catch them.

"Of his death?" Mrs. Porter and Winthrop exclaimed in hushed surprise.

"Yes, his death! Oh!" she struck her clenched fist upon the palm of her hand. "Such a little thing to make such a difference! If it had been sent ten minutes, even five minutes later, he would be alive and well now! But it wasn't! It cost my husband his life and me — my happiness!"

"I don't understand: what happened? Was he taken ill?" Mrs. Porter bent over the sobbing woman and patted her shoulder with soothing touch as she put the questions. By and by the paroxysm of choking sobs ceased. She went on with her sad story.

"No, not that, but he would have been safe on the steamer, if only — but it's too late now! Walter left the boat just as they were hauling in the gang-plank. Then he telephoned several places and finally arranged for us to make the trip on a steam freighter belonging to a business friend of his. The *Dunkirk* was to have cleared for England that noon, but had been detained by a strike among the dock men. We were to be honored guests. The captain gave up his own cabin to us, and everything was done for our comfort. The arrangements, hurried as they were, proved very satisfactory in spite of the fact that the steamer carried no passengers ordinarily. Neither of us had a single regret for the luxuries of the liner; the quiet of the *Dunkirk* promised a perfect honeymoon, and best of all we would be free from an inquisitive crowd of fellow passengers.

"The next few hours were filled with happiness too deep for words, but before nine o'clock that night it was all over. A few hours of bliss — a life-time of hopeless regret and misery, for me! Without warning the *Dunkirk* struck one of the treacherous coral reefs and sank before aid could reach her. I was saved — almost by a miracle. I remember clinging to my husband — then something struck me and — that is all I knew until I woke from weeks

of delirium to find myself back in my mother's home, my marriage, my few hours of honeymoon scarcely more than a dream. In one short day I became wife and widow."

She ended abruptly and sat staring straight ahead of her in gloomy retrospect, one slender arched foot in its soft black suede tie, tapping the floor with nervous regularity.

Her simple, unvarnished account had touched both listeners deeply. In their pity for her, they lost sight, for the time being, of the tremendous effect it would have upon their own lives. Winthrop was the first to recover himself sufficiently to realize the complication this new element would cause.

"This is a great surprise to us," he commented quietly. "Of course we knew nothing — we had only the lawyer's statement — You — you have proofs —" He broke off, his tone almost apologetic.

"Certainly, Mr. Porter. I can readily understand how my story must sound to you, but this," pulling off her long suede glove and touching a plain gold band on the middle finger of her left hand, "is my wedding-ring. Walter had our names engraved in it. See!"

She slipped the ring from her finger and handed it to him. The inscription within. "Walter to Winifred," was very distinct. It was followed by a date of a few months earlier.

"But you called yourself —"

"Mrs. William Husted. Yes. We were married under that name. Walter promised to take it with the fortune his benefactor, Mr. Husted, left

him. In fact it was a condition in the will, I believe. The man hadn't a relative in the world and he hated to have his name die out. But my husband preferred his own name, naturally. I always called him Walter when we were alone."

"This happened several months ago. Why did you wait so long before communicating with us?"

"For weeks I was too ill to care about anything. Besides, I knew nothing of the will drawn up before Walter met me. I learned of it for the first time when I went to see his lawyer in reference to his money. Our marriage took place so suddenly Walter had not yet taken steps to have a new will drawn up. He had simply telephoned the lawyer that he was called to England unexpectedly and would see him on his return. Don't think that he was careless of my well-being, please don't! He was young and strong; why should he dream that there was need of haste?"

"And your proofs?" Winthrop persisted quietly.

"My marriage certificate went down with the *Dunkirk* — I had slipped it into Walter's traveling bag on our way down to the steamer — but fortunately I had one witness, our faithful nurse, and my mother's signed deposition."

"Deposition?" Winthrop questioned sharply.

"Yes. She died just as I was recovering. The wreck of my life was too much for her in her weak state. The lawyer investigated my claim thoroughly; it was right that he should. He examined the record in the church register, interviewed the rector

who married us, secured all available details of the disaster and the rescue — they were meager enough, I believe — and convinced himself, before communicating with you. Even a part of such a fortune is too great to be surrendered on a questionable claim, I realize that, thoroughly."

"A part!" Mrs. Porter repeated. "But surely Walter intended you to have —"

"Walter intended me to have it all, I know," she replied proudly. "He spoke of his wealth the night before the wedding and said that he gloried in it for my sake. But without a will I believe I can only claim —"

"You can claim it all because it is yours!" Mrs. Porter interrupted in decisive tones. "Sh!" she raised her hand as Winthrop stepped forward impulsively. "Not a word! This is my affair, and I'll settle it as my conscience dictates."

"But mother, part of the money belongs to us. Don't you see that? The will was valid. Surely the law —"

She interrupted passionately.

"Man's law, you mean. Do you think I could pray to my Creator if I swindled this poor wife out of money that I feel, deep down in my heart, is rightfully hers? Yes, all of it! Could I bear to face Walter, later, and know that I had taken advantage of his untimely death to rob the creature he loved best in all the world? That I was exacting tribute for my care of him? And what good would the money do us? What has it done already, pray? My sons have begun, even this early, to spend what

they don't possess. No! this is God's intervention — I feel it so."

Winthrop and the widow stared at her spellbound during her passionate outburst, the former almost doubting his own senses. Was this his quiet, placid mother, this flushed and panting woman asserting herself so boldly? That she meant what she said; that she intended to renounce all claim to the fortune; that he was powerless to check her quixotic course came over him with sickening force. Nevertheless, he was powerless; the decision lay with her, and no words of his would avail to change her. He realized this fully, and a dull resentment against his mother's arbitrary decision filled his breast. He tried to conquer it, to remember her goodness, her unselfishness, her love, but in spite of every effort his thoughts harked back insistently to the money that was no longer theirs. An impotent curse made its way to his lips but failed of utterance.

The widow seemed to read his thoughts and to comprehend their bitterness. With a swift movement she advanced to his side and laid her hand upon his arm.

"This is a blow to you. I feel sorry for you, sorry from the bottom of my heart. But I am Walter's wife. My claim will bear the scrutiny of the whole world!"

As she spoke her head was upraised in defiance, then it sank again, and despondent gloom once more settled upon her like a pall.

"The lawyer was going to cable as soon as he was convinced," she went on, "but I persuaded him

to write to you instead. He feels his mistake keenly, but he was not to blame. When he sent the letter, there was nothing to make him think that there could be any complications. The will was drawn up in good form, and there were, apparently, no other heirs. He could not understand why I insisted on coming to America, but I felt that I must see you personally — must explain —"

"It needs no explanation," Mrs. Porter assured her. "We will always appreciate Walter's thought of us. Nothing can ever take that away from us."

"But he would never have left you out of the new will," Winthrop asserted with dogged conviction. "Of that I feel certain. You know how he loved you."

"Let me share with you," the widow offered impulsively.

"Not share, no! Perhaps a little — there are my boys, you know — but we'll wait and see; time enough for that, later. I am only thankful that this news comes when it does, before — It would have been harder then — for them, at least."

She spoke in disconnected sentences, her resolve not to claim her pound of flesh still firm, but modified, in a slight degree, by Winthrop's attitude, which expressed a mingling of disappointment, longing, anger and reproach, an attitude she knew would be reflected by the rest of the family.

"The lawyer's letter ought to reach you soon," the low, even tones went on. "It will corroborate my story in every detail. I wish I could tell you how sorry I am to be the means of depriving you of this

money. I care nothing for it — now — but it was Walter's. He worked hard to earn it, even after Mr. Husted's inheritance came. And I know that he was working for my sake. Until the night before we were married I never dreamed how wealthy he was; if mother knew his circumstances she did not confide in me. He kept the secret as a surprise — his wedding present, he called it. His lawyer —"

A loud peal of the door-bell echoed through the house. It startled the visitor, but she recovered herself immediately.

"Only the postman," Mrs. Porter reassured her. "He's late to-day. He always rings loud enough to wake the dead. Oh! forgive me!" she added, as she saw an involuntary quiver pass over the widow's face. "I — I forgot!"

Winthrop stalked to the front door to receive the mail. As Mrs. Porter finished her apology, they heard the postman's loud cheery voice.

"Here's another letter from the other end of the earth, Mr. Porter. Remember the last one? That brought good luck and then some, didn't it? Hope this one won't take it away again!" With a ringing guffaw at the absurdity of his words, he shouldered his bag and tramped down the walk.

"The other end of the earth!" the stranger repeated, visible excitement in her manner. "I wonder — Oh! do you think it could be the lawyer's letter? He promised to write at once."

Winthrop nodded, but before he handed the letter to his mother he slashed it open with his aunt's ebony paper cutter in a way that evidently relieved

his feelings. He had missed his usual boat, but all thoughts of the office had been driven from his mind by the strange developments of the morning. He was oppressed by the crushing weight of the stranger's communication; by the knowledge that the fortune, actually within their grasp, had taken unto itself wings. That the embodiment of those wings, in spite of her glorious beauty, her appealing voice, and her wonderful eyes, was effectually flying away with all his plans for the future, was slowly penetrating his numbed faculties, yet it was his mother on whom his accusing thoughts centered; his mother, with her absurd ideas of right and wrong, her tenacity in clinging to such uncalled for renunciation. It was selfishness, pure and simple, he decided, and for a few moments everything grew red before him; he almost felt as though he hated her. Then he recovered himself and an unvoiced prayer for forgiveness filled his thoughts to the exclusion even of rebellious repinings.

On the other side of the boundary fence Marjory was still hovering about the windows, watching for him. She felt that she could not begin her day without his customary greeting. She had seen the arrival of the stranger; had even caught a glimpse of her face as she turned to speak to the chauffeur. She noted the graceful figure as the visitor swept from the motor to the front door. With a woman's quick instinct she had appraised her beauty, appraised it fairly too, in terms of masculine appreciation: "Perfectly stunning!" Since then she had racked her brains to think of a reason for the visit. Pos-

sibly it had something to do with Miss Mystery; some rich relative come to claim her, perhaps! In her excitement she was about to slip over and find out, but just as she opened the door she caught sight of Mystery herself, with Bugs as escort, walking briskly past, evidently en route for the stores. The unconcerned wave of greeting she sent her dashed that theory to bits.

As the minutes passed and still Winthrop tarried, her eagerness became impatience, and that, in turn, resentment.

"He might know that I'm anxious to hear about it, whatever it is," she thought. "He has no right to be so inconsiderate. Probably he's too busy entertaining her even to remember my existence. She looks like one of those women that men go crazy over. I detest that type myself; just big, handsome animals, that's what they are."

That she was robbing an unoffending sister of mind and soul did not occur to her; nor did she really believe that Winthrop was detained because of attentions to the visitor, but love has strange ways of self-mortification.

Meanwhile Mrs. Porter read the lawyer's letter through carefully, from his sincere apology for the grave mistake he had made, to his regretful announcement that he had thoroughly investigated the new claimant's proofs and had found no flaw in them. When she finished, she passed it over to Winthrop and turned to the visitor, on whose face there was a strained, anxious look.

"It is all right, my dear. He has told us the

story exactly as you have done. And he has added even stronger evidence of its truth."

"Stronger evidence?" she repeated, in startled tones. "Why, how could there be stronger evidence? The actual facts are strong enough."

"I know, dear, I know. I should have said 'additional evidence.' You poor creature! You're all unstrung! Why, you're trembling like a leaf, and no wonder! It must be terrible to recall such a harrowing experience. Believe me, we never doubted you for an instant, did we, Win?"

"No!" he replied bluntly, as he advanced towards her with outstretched hand. She put both of hers into it, and looking up into his face, murmured gratefully: "You are so good to me! If you could only know how I dreaded this interview! Why, you might have thought I was an impostor! Some people would, or would have pretended they thought so, rather than give up such a fortune. That was why I took this long journey. I felt that I must explain to Walter's people personally — must make them understand that it is not the money but my right, my position, that I am establishing. But I had no idea until I arrived, that Mr. Tuttle's explanation had not yet reached you. It has made it doubly hard for me."

"Will you read his letter?" Winthrop asked courteously. "It tells the story substantially as you have done — with fewer details, of course, but that is to be expected. He also says that he received word from Walter, two weeks earlier, that circumstances, whose nature he did not state, had

arisen which would necessitate making a new will. He intended to see him, as you said, when he returned from his trip. That it was a wedding-trip, the lawyer did not know, at the time."

"He referred to his approaching marriage, of course," she agreed, with a sigh; "but the date had not been set then. Since the will was not changed, perhaps —" She stopped with an embarrassed flush.

"I know what you mean," Mrs. Porter interrupted, taking pity on her confusion. "What I don't know about the law would fill an encyclopedia, but you may rest assured on one point: we will make no claim whatever. I'd feel as though I were insulting that poor boy's memory to quarrel over his money. Walter's fortune belongs to Walter's wife. We will always appreciate his thought of us — nothing can change that — but when a man marries, all other ties must take second place."

"You are the best woman I've ever met in my life!" The impulsive avowal seemed to come from the visitor almost against her will.

"My son and I both wish to help you in any way we can," Mrs. Porter went on, turning towards Winthrop anxiously as she spoke. Her anxiety was relieved by the promptness with which he supplemented her offer. He had fought his fight and won, but it was not an easy victory.

"I shall be glad to be of service," he assured the widow heartily. "Pray don't hesitate to command me."

"We'll see you again, I hope," Mrs. Porter said

as she bade her visitor good-by. "Are you stopping in St. George?"

"Oh, no! I'm at the Waldorf!" Seeing a look of surprise on their faces, she added in explanation: "My companion, an old friend, chose the hotel. She's an inveterate sightseer and likes to be in the heart of things. My stay will probably be short now that I have seen you, so I did not think it worth while to insist on a quieter place. It doesn't matter much anyway; nothing matters now."

"Poor little woman!" Winthrop muttered under his breath, giving the hand she extended a sympathetic pressure.

"Won't you come to us while you are here?" Mrs. Porter urged with hospitable warmth. "Walter's wife would be sure of a hearty welcome."

"Thank you, but I could not bear to sadden any one with my grief. Besides, I have my old friend with me. I think she prefers to stay in town."

Winthrop escorted her to the waiting motor and helped her in, then lifted his hat and was turning away, when she placed a detaining hand on his arm.

"I fear I have made you very late," she murmured regretfully. "Let me take you at least as far as the ferry, do!"

"Thanks!" He accepted the offer promptly, and seated himself beside her. As they whirled down the avenue he was so engrossed in what she was saying that he forgot to look up when they passed the Chamberlin's. Marjory's heart sank as she noted the omission, but the next moment she chided herself for her foolishness.

"If I'm going to fly off the reel every time he looks at another woman, life won't be worth living. And I do trust him, perfectly, only — she's so handsome!"

CHAPTER XIII

FOOD FOR SUBURBAN GOSSIPS

"There was a Door to which I found no Key;
There was a Veil through which I might not see;
. . . . . .
And by and by my Soul return'd to me."

The news of the second change in the Porter fortunes flew about the suburb with the incredible speed that such news invariably develops. By some it was received with trustful credulity; by others with outspoken doubts. All day long the Porter telephone and door-bell jangled, as people hastened to headquarters to learn the truth in regard to the exciting rumor.

"So they're not millionaires after all," Mrs. Thorne remarked, with a tinge suspiciously like complacence in her tone. "I thought something like this would turn up." "This" evidently meant the widow. "Gold mines are not a drug in the market, let me tell you! Getting one all of a sudden, as they did, is too good to be true, in this world, at least." From which her hearers were led to infer that gold mines of unexpected acquisition were common in other and presumably more reliable worlds of her acquaintance.

"I had my doubts from the very start," she went

on. "When I first heard of the fortune I said there'd be a string tied to it somewhere. And after all it's a young and handsome widow who jerks the string. Well, it's up to Winthrop, now, to keep the money in the family."

"Up to Winthrop?" one of the listeners questioned in surprise. "Why? Is he going to bring suit? Can they still claim it even if Walter was actually married?"

"I don't know about that, I'm sure," was the careless reply. "I should think they could, though; a will's a will, widow or no widow. Anyhow, they can claim two-thirds, I believe. But I meant that Win might marry her, and settle it that way."

"But you forget Marjory. Win can't be a Mormon even for the sake of the Warren fortune."

"Pshaw! hasn't he been playing fast and loose with her all fall for a mere nobody? I suppose it was from purely impersonal motives that he was teaching that girl to dance, and play tennis and row, wasn't it? Of course it was — not! I wish you could have seen him when he rode down to the ferry with the widow. The car stopped directly in front of our house while the chauffeur got out to fix something or other. She was gazing into his face fairly drinking in his words, and he was drinking in her beauty. I saw it with my own eyes. They were so interested in each other they didn't seem to notice the delay at all."

And so the case was reviewed again and again, over the tea-cups, at the club, in the stores; wherever two or more matrons or maids congregated, the War-

ren wealth and the new claimant so unexpectedly projected upon the suburban horizon, were the all-engrossing topics. And the interest was not altogether among the women, either. Even the non-gossiping sex seemed to develop a suspicious thirst for information on the subject. During the next few days it was threshed out from St. George to the Battery by more than one manly group. That Mrs. Porter's stand was quixotic was the general decision. Old Mr. Van Antwerp, who never let a penny get past him if he saw it first,— he held the record for having reminded a fellow suburbanite of a one-cent stamp he had borrowed from him — expressed the popular opinion in a nut-shell.

"Going to give up all claim?" he repeated in horrified accents.

"Yes. Thinks it would be an insult to Warren's memory to haggle over the matter."

"But she don't have to haggle! She's entitled to everything except the widow's dower."

"She thinks it all belongs to the wife, by rights, and refuses to take advantage of the fact that he neglected to change his will. I think she's pretty self-sacrificing, myself."

"Sentimental tommy-rot! I think she's a blamed fool!"

In these discussions the widow became a veritable chameleon. She was all things to all women, turning from blond to brunette and back again with the speed of a lightning-change artist. She was young; she was middle-aged; she was old and wrinkled! She was tall and commanding; she was petite and

appealing! At times she had been all regretful graciousness in the momentous interview with the Porters; at others, she had threatened to sue them — for what, was left to the individual imagination.

Aunt Mig heard about the widow before she got home from her shopping-tour. One of the neighbors waylaid her on the way up from the ferry; she had watched the avenue untiringly for the pleasure of breaking the news. Miss Mig listened with grave attention, preserving a discreet silence even at the end of the exciting narrative. When she reached home she still remained silent — a non-committal silence that expressed neither rebellion nor regret. Mrs. Porter nervously awaited her outburst, but she waited in vain. She herself had explained the case to Katy, who was all agog over the news.

"Bless my heart! An' do we have to give all that money back? Won't we have no butlers nor no French maids ever at all, now?" Mrs. Porter reassured her on both these points. "Glory be! I'm that happy I could do a buck and wing all by myself, I could! Fortunes is all very well for them as likes 'em, but I don't! I suppose she'll give you a slice of it, though, won't she? That'd come in quite handy, I'm thinking."

"I suppose she will. I've decided to accept whatever she settles upon me, now that my conscience is clear regarding the bulk of it. Have corned beef and cabbage for supper to-night, Katy. Chester's asked for it several times, but —"

"An' what'll I do with them there little crimped up cases Miss Mig brought home from town?" Katy

asked. "She said to serve the oysters in 'em for the on — you know — that fancy business we've been stickin' in lately."

"Use them just as she requested, Katy, but have the other things too. We'll go on exactly as we did before we heard of the fortune. We never really had the money, so it can't make a great difference to any of us."

"An' will she — the widdy — live with us, now?"

"Why, no, certainly not! What put such an idea as that into your head, Katy? She has her own home and friends in Australia. Did any one suggest that she was to stay here?"

Katy tried to evade answering, but Mrs. Porter pressed the question.

"Mis' Thorne's girl she said as how you'd better take in rich widdys than poor nobodies. I just up an' told her to mind her own business. Miss Mystery ain't no nobody, I told her, an' never was. She's a somebody as sure as my name's Kate, even if we don't never find out who, so there!"

It was not until just before the evening meal that Chester learned what the day had brought forth. He sat stunned, at first, his face showing a sickly pallor even through its freckles. When he recovered his power of speech he broke into angry denunciations.

"That widow's a fake! It's just a get-rich-quick scheme, that's what it is! She must think we're easy marks, but she'll find out her mistake, good and plenty! I'd just like to see her take our fortune! Let her try it, that's all!"

His mother let him talk for a few moments,

I knew that you'd need my help in reorganizing the household, and I gave up my work willingly, but I've taught so long," she went on almost apologetically, "that it was a dreadful wrench. It had become second nature to me — a big part of my life, bigger even than I myself realized, and so — well, I've missed it, I must confess. I kept feeling that I was needed over there, too." She pointed over her shoulder in the direction of the High School. "Several of my boys and girls were at a critical juncture when I left. If they fail at the end of the term, I shall blame myself severely. I've just been arranging to tutor them a bit."

"Oh, I see! It's good of you to do it for nothing, when other teachers charge so much. I hope they'll appreciate it."

"I'm charging the usual rate," Miss Mig replied shortly.

"But I thought you didn't believe in teachers giving private lessons! You always said that they ought to leave those extra pickings for others."

"Under ordinary circumstances I strongly disapprove of it, but — well, I'm not a teacher now, and I need the money. Need it! I should say I do need it." With the words her assumed indifference slipped off like a garment; she broke forth into passionate self-upbraiding. "I've played the fool, that's the whole matter in a nutshell. When I think of the hole I've made in my savings it makes me sick. And what have I got to show for it?" She choked and shook her head. "Foolish fripperies, that's all!"

"Fripperies? Why, Mig, what did you get besides a few clothes —"

"Yes, clothes!" she repeated savagely. "Velvet and feathers and lace! There's no fool like an old fool, is there?" Her tone was bitter with self-contempt. "And I ordered a set of toilet articles at Vantine's — ivory, mind you! And cut glass perfume bottles and — oh! I can't bear to think of it! I suppose I've got to take them, now, unless you think they'd let me countermand the order, do you?"

"They wouldn't refuse, probably; they can always dispose of them. But you have a right to dainty things if you want them, Mig," her sister objected. "You've worked hard enough all your life to earn them."

"Do you realize that the very money I've been squandering on luxuries may be needed some day to put Chester through college? Suppose Winthrop should get sick and need nurses and doctors? It was different before she — the widow came. You had more than enough then."

Mrs. Porter impulsively put her arm around her sister-in-law, books, duster and all, and kissed her.

"That fortune accomplished one thing in its flight, Miggy! It brought to light the sweet disposition you've been concealing so strenuously all these years." There was a little catch in her voice as she went on: "Why, in all this suburb I don't believe a single person begrudged you your good luck; no, sir, not even when you flaunted it in their faces."

"Flaunted?" Miss Mig turned in astonishment. "Why, sister! I — flaunted?"

"Yes, you — flaunted,— but you didn't know it. And they all understood, too, I'm sure, in spite of the way you harped on butlers and maids and that eternal style of yours. But honestly, Mig, you don't have to teach any more. You've done your share. Win's business is getting better and better, and I'll probably have some of Walter's money, so why not stay at home and take it easy? We'll have enough to live on comfortably. Do!"

"Take it easy?" Aunt Mig echoed with grim emphasis. She was cranking up, as it were; when she actually started Mrs. Porter marveled at the concentrated passion of her confession. Was this the grande dame of the last few weeks, the epitome of graciousness, the woman whose one aim was to establish the family on a footing suitable to its new wealth? She stared at her, fascinated. "Take it easy! No, thank you! I've been taking it easy for a month; another month would kill me! Why, I've sat at my window day after day — oh! I know — you thought I was primping or fiddling over fancy-work, didn't you? And I let you think so. But I've sat there watching my boys and girls go by on their way to school until I've actually had to hold on to my chair to keep from rushing after them! No, I'm not exaggerating, not a bit of it! A month, did I say? It seemed a year! And each day I've gone over every lesson, word for word. If I hadn't I think I should have gone mad. Take it easy! I'll take it easy when I'm back where I be-

long — at my desk with a good, big class in front of me. Then I'll take it easy, and not before!"

"Well, Mig Porter! Of all the shams!" Mrs. Porter's voice was full of indignation. "And you seemed to fairly revel in luxury and idleness! Why, you nearly drove me wild with those awful plans of yours. We all thought you were in your element; that being rich suited you down to the ground!"

"So did I," she acknowledged shamefacedly; "until I tried it. I know better now! I've changed my mind about many things. One is that unlimited leisure isn't what it's cracked up to be. My idea of Heaven is more than a seat and a harp, let me tell you! I'm surfeited with leisure. Back to the grind for me," she went on with airy flippancy. "*À BAS* French lingerie! Union suits forever!"

This, from Miss Mig Porter, the apostle of pure speech; Miss Mig, to whom the use of slang had furnished the text for many a sermon! Mrs. Porter actually pinched herself to be sure that the whole thing was not a figment of her imagination. But a glance at the lady herself, briskly sorting and arranging the books and pamphlets which filled the old case to overflowing, was convincing. Still more so was the sound of her voice raised in song. Aunt Mig often boasted that she did not know one note from another. She didn't — or if she did she could not translate them into tuneful sound; yet there she stood, vigorously adjuring the world at large to "Work for the night is coming!" she herself working away as though the shadows were almost upon her.

"Thank goodness!" Mrs. Porter ejaculated fervently, as she made a futile effort to understand this new quirk in her sister-in-law's character, then gave up the riddle. How she had dreaded telling her of her renunciation of the money! It seemed like stripping her, at one fell swoop, of butler and chef, trips abroad and runs at home, linen and lingerie, style and station. She had prepared for a battle, intending to stand by her guns in the face of all argument, but before her stood the enemy with no vestige of war-paint or feathers, cheerfully attesting that she was glad to give up the fortune, glad to take up her life-work again. Would wonders never cease!

Chester hurried through his lunch, that day, and rushed out, but stopped at the door long enough to tell his mother that he would not be home until late in the afternoon. She was still at the table, her seat facing the window. To her surprise, instead of crossing towards school, he dashed over the lawn and climbed the fence into the Chamberlin's garden.

"I wonder why he's going there?" she remarked aloud. "Perhaps he waits for Marjy. That would be queer though; he's just at the shy age. And the other boys don't seem to escort the girls to school. At least I haven't noticed it."

"They don't!" Aunt Mig remarked with finality. "Neither does he! There goes Marjy now, with that crowd of girls, and Ches isn't anywhere in sight."

Mrs. Porter finished her lunch and hovered about the window, wondering, with motherly concern, what was detaining the boy so long. Finally she decided

that he must have been given some commission by Marjory or Mrs. Chamberlin. She was about to turn away when she saw the boy hurry out of the side door, stop long enough to give his hands a vigorous wiping upon his trousers, then sprint across to the school. She noted, with relief, that he reached the boys' entrance just as the last bell was ringing.

"I'll have to speak to him about it," she thought. "This won't do. I can't have him tardy, even to oblige a friend."

That evening supper was almost over before he appeared, but no one commented on his lateness. The basket-ball season would shortly be in full swing; they took it for granted that he was practicing with his team. As soon as supper was over, he set to work on his lessons for the next day, but at half-past eight when his mother went up to speak to him, she found him with his head down on his arm, fast asleep, an open history on the table before him. She awakened him gently and ordered him to bed, but the next morning Katy reported that he was up and busy over his lessons when she came down to start breakfast.

This went on for two weeks; not once during that time was he at home before the supper hour, and several times he ate after the others had left the table. His evening study suffered, but he invariably made it up by early rising the next day. His mother wondered what he was finding so engrossing, to the exclusion of his usual sports, for it was not basket-ball, she discovered; on three successive afternoons there had been insistent demands, via the telephone, for

him to report at the gym for practice on pain of forfeiting his place on the team. With the wisdom that had endeared her to her sons, she refrained from questioning him as long as he did not neglect his lessons — a tentative inquiry or two had reassured her on that point — feeling that a confidence forced is but half a confidence, after all.

At the end of the two weeks her patience was rewarded. Mystery called her into her room one morning, and shutting the door, asked in an excited whisper:

"What do you think Ches is doing?"

"I don't know, dear. Nothing wrong, I hope. Whatever it is he seems all tired out, I notice. What is it? Not more debts?"

"You won't tell any one if I tell you? Promise, please do! I think you ought to know."

"I promise."

"He's doing — this!"

She reached into her bureau drawer and held up to view a man's purse that had seen long and arduous service.

"There's ten dollars in it," she announced solemnly.

"Ten dollars! Why, where —"

"It's his! He earned it!"

"Earned it? How?"

"Oh, by doing all sorts of things — things he wouldn't have dreamed of doing before. He cleaned up the Chamberlin's cellar, for one thing — Marjory says he's made a splendid job of it, too — and he's been chopping wood and clearing up gardens and

— oh! everything. Isn't he just the dearest boy you ever saw?"

"But I don't understand it!" Mrs. Porter's voice was plainly puzzled. "What does he want to get with it? A motorcycle?"

"No, indeed!" Mystery spoke almost resentfully. "He's working to pay off that twenty-five dollars he owes. And he'll do it, too; you see if he don't! He told me it didn't seem much money at first, while you had the fortune, but it's as big as a house, now. He'll never get into debt again, I'll warrant."

"Thank you for helping him, Mystery. You've been a real sister to him. He loves you dearly, or he wouldn't confide in you as he does. But then, we all do. You're a regular bank for confidences! I don't see what we ever did without you. I couldn't spare you now, I know. I'm terribly selfish, dear; I'm almost hoping that no one will ever claim you — almost, but not quite — for your sake!"

Mystery snuggled into the outstretched arms, and laid her head on the motherly bosom with a little sigh. Her voice, when she replied, was a mingling of contentment and unrest.

"So do I — almost!"

As she left the room, Mrs. Porter's mind was a chaos of conflicting emotions, but pride in her boy's newly awakened sense of honor, as evinced by his prompt measures to pay off his debts, predominated. The possession of the fortune had plunged the lad into reckless expenditure, and even bade fair to lead him on to dissipation; its loss was bringing out the true manliness beneath the boyish veneer of slang

and indifference. Truly God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform! She breathed a prayer of thanksgiving from the depths of her mother-heart.

Just before bedtime that night, Marjy Chamberlin knocked timidly at her aunt's door. In response to a cheery "Come in, come in, whoever you are!" she entered, but paused just within the room, her face flushing and paling, her hands working nervously. Marjory stared at her in surprise which changed to alarm, as the girl suddenly dropped to her knees, buried her head in the couch and burst into a passion of sobs.

"Darling! What is it? Are you sick? Wait, I'll call your mother or telephone —"

"No, no, don't! please don't!" she pleaded. "I don't want mother to know. I didn't want any one to know, but I just had to tell you, because — I tried not to, but my feet seemed to bring me right up to your door. Oh, dear! oh, dear! you'll never forgive me. Never! I promised I'd do it, but I forgot. Everybody'll hate me now, I just know they will. And I don't blame them, either! I deserve to be hated. You can't depend on anybody that breaks her word. I ought to go to prison! I've killed her, I know I have! If she dies, I'll be a murderess!"

"Marjy!" Her aunt's fright lent sternness to her tone. "What have you done? Tell me instantly, do you hear? or I'll call your father."

"I — I didn't mean to — but I — forgot — to — give — it — back —"

"To give what back?"

"That pin you found on your kimona, don't you

remember? I told you it belonged to Miss Mig — she told Ches she'd lost a pin — but I never took it over."

"You've kept that pin all this time? Why, Marjy Chamberlin! how could you be so careless? Did she scold you? What did she say? Tell me, dearie! Tell Aunty Mar!" Her tone became coaxing; the girl's distress frightened her. "Come, come, honey! you'll make yourself sick! I'll explain it to Miss Mig; she'll understand. Anyhow, her bark's ever so much worse than her bite."

"No! she won't! She'll never understand! She's — dead, I tell you! She's dead! She's dead!"

"Why, Marjy — Aunt Mig's dead?"

"No. Miss Mystery! And I killed her! I know she's dead by this time!"

"Tell me what you mean!" She gave the hysterical child an unmistakable shake. "If you don't tell me right away I'll throw this pitcher of cold water over you. Now go on! Do you hear?"

Marjy obeyed, but her overwrought state made the disjointed confession almost unintelligible.

"I — I went over — to see — Ches — to — to ask him to put up a telephone between my house and Alice Chapin's. He knows how to make the kind you pull little boxes back and —"

"Oh! go on! I don't care about the telephone! Tell me what happened!" Marjory spoke firmly, though it was with difficulty she controlled the nervous trembling that assailed her.

"Just as I was leaving, Miss Mystery called me

into her room to show me something she's making for Mrs. Porter. It's awful pretty — you know, one of those Irish crochet bags with —"

"Never mind!" came the stern edict. "Go on!"

"I just happened — by accident — to have that pin in my collar and —"

"Why, Marjy! Deliberately wearing a thing that doesn't belong to you! Oh! how could you?"

"I don't know, but I did. Anyhow, she saw it. She kept watching it and watching it, just like a cat watches a mouse, but I don't mean she's a cat though, because I think she's the prettiest, sweetest —" The look on her aunt's face brought her encomiums to a full stop. She went on hurriedly: "And finally she walked up to me just like this." The child was a good mimic; she went forward with hesitating step, her eyes opened wide in a fascinated gaze almost like that of a sleep walker. Marjory shivered in spite of herself, and gave a little cry of terror when her niece finally reached her and laid her outstretched hand upon her throat.

"It was just as though she had to walk up to me whether she wanted to or not. When her hand touched the pin she gave a queer little sound almost like a moan, then she jerked it off — yes, jerked it! See where she tore the lace? That hole wasn't there when I put the collar on this morning, honestly it wasn't."

"What did she do then?" Marjory spoke in a whisper. She was quivering with eagerness and anxiety. Oh! why had she been so ugly! Why hadn't she stifled her foolish jealousy and returned

the pin herself? It was partly Marjy's fault for saying it belonged to Miss Mig. If it should mean anything to Mystery and all these weeks lost — "What did she do then?" she demanded again, in harsh tones, towering threateningly over the cringing girl.

"Her face was as white as — as that bed-spread, and her eyes looked just like burning glasses. They hurt me. She'll be sick and die, I know she will, and then I'll —"

"Go on!" came the inexorable command.

"She shut her fist up tight over the pin just like this, then she took me by the shoulder and pushed me out of the room, just as though I were a child!" With the words Marjy's mood changed; remorse gave place to resentment at the cavalier treatment she had received.

"If she had spanked you first it would have served you right," her aunt commented vindictively. "You had no business to forget to return the pin after you promised, and you had no right to be so positive when you were not sure at all. Just see the trouble you've caused, you bad girl!" While she was speaking she seized a cloak from the closet and wrapped it about her. "Don't say one word of this to any one else, do you understand? Not one word!"

"And you won't tell father? Please, Marjory! I'm awful sorry I didn't take it right back, but I forgot —"

"Yes, it looks as though you forgot when you were wearing it!"

"But this was the only time — cross my heart,

hope I may die if it wasn't! It got pushed down into a big crack at the back of my bureau drawer; that's why I didn't remember it. I only found it this morning, and I put it on so I'd be sure not to forget it again. I intended to give it to Miss Mig after school. I was late to-day; I had to rush like sixty!"

"Oh! that's different! Why didn't you say so at first? I'm glad you didn't deliberately keep it, Marjy. I'd never have respected you again. Don't forget, now — not one word to any one!"

"I promise!" Marjy called after her, as she sped down the stairs and out through the back way.

But she returned again in a few minutes, with dragging step, disappointment written all over her flushed face. In spite of her pleading, Miss Mystery had denied her admittance. In response to urgent questioning, she had insisted that she was not sick and needed nothing.

Marjory had hesitated outside the closed door, debating whether or not she ought to go to Mrs. Porter with the story of the pin. Mystery evidently divined her thoughts.

"I'm not sick, Marjory — only tired," she urged, the dreary hopelessness in her voice bringing tears to her listener's eyes. "Please don't say anything to anybody, not even mother, please, Marjory! It's only a — a headache. I'll be all right to-morrow. I want to think."

So Marjory was forced to return without learning whether the pin had been the means of throwing light into her darkened past, or had simply stirred

up buried memories without effectually clearing away the mists. The fear of intruding, of forcing a confidence, had kept her from all reference to Marjy's story, the reason for her visit, but that it was at the root of the trouble she was fully convinced.

And she was right. After Mystery had forcibly ejected the startled girl, she locked her door and stood still, her eyes fixed upon the pin in troubled scrutiny, until, with a little cry, her fingers seemed to seek the hidden spring without volition on her part. In response to her pressure the pin opened, and she found herself gazing into the pictured face within. For a long, long moment she stared at it as though fascinated, her eyes wide with wonder, expectation, hope, her mind in travail with memories struggling to be born anew. As the darkened past yielded its secrets, one after another, the wonder died out of the great blue eyes. A startled look filled them, and this in turn became affrighted. Again she searched the pictured face, then without a sound, she dropped to the floor senseless.

How long a time passed she never knew. When she finally recovered consciousness, she raised herself up and looked about in bewilderment, until memory rolled a flood of recollections over her mind. A devastating flood it was, a flood that swept away hope and happiness in its resistless onward rush. With a low moan of anguish she buried her face in her hands and rocked back and forth in an abandonment of misery pitiful to behold.

"Oh no! no! no!" she sobbed heart-brokenly.

"Not that! Not that! I can't bear it! Oh, I can't bear it! Why did I ever remember?"

When Marjory came to the door the first paroxysm was over and she had crept into bed, all dressed as she was. Through the long, long hours of the night she lay staring fixedly into the darkness, thinking, thinking, thinking. . . .

CHAPTER XIV

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

"But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days:
Hither and thither moves, and checks . . ."

When Mystery did not appear at breakfast, Mrs. Porter left the table and went up-stairs to see what was the matter.

"She says she has a headache," she announced on her return. Her face looked troubled.

"A headache?" Miss Mig repeated in astonishment. "Why, she never complained of a headache before. I hope—" What she hoped was not made known to the rest of the family, because she left the table abruptly.

"'Scuse John!'" Chester quoted with boyish malice, pleased to catch his aunt napping.

"Stop that, Ches!" Mrs. Porter commanded. "Aunt Mig's probably coming back — she's not through breakfast yet — so she doesn't need to be excused."

"Look here, Kid," Winthrop began loftily, "you're entirely too —"

"Insistent on the niceties of accepted convention?" the boy inquired, quoting one of Miss Mig's frequently heard formulas. "Once let the family life

lapse into the familiarity that breeds contempt and — it's all off!" he finished hurriedly as he caught sight of his aunt just entering the dining-room. She, too, looked troubled.

"I'm afraid she's going to be sick," she said in worried tones. "Perhaps we'd better call up —"

"She doesn't want the doctor," Mrs. Porter interrupted. "She begged me not to send for him. She said she just wanted to keep quiet and think —"

"Think!" Miss Mig repeated. "Do you suppose something has happened to —"

"Oh! if it only were that! But what could have happened? She was all right when she went up to her room early last night. She said she had some work to do. I think Marjory ran over to see her later — I heard them talking. But if she isn't better by noontime I'll certainly have Doctor Guthrie see her. He'd never forgive me if — er — Chester, did you get all your lessons for to-day?" she demanded sharply, trying to cover her confusion at the slip she had made.

Before Chester had time to reassure her, the telephone bell jangled its insistent summons. Winthrop, who was just leaving the table, stepped out into the hall, jerked off the receiver, and began the impatient "Hello! Hello! Hell-o!" with which most men open their conversations over the wire.

"One-o-o-x?" Central inquired after an aggravating delay. "Here's your party."

"It's a New York call," Winthrop informed his mother, then entered upon the usual one-sided, curiosity-arousing confab.

"Yes . . . Oh, yes . . . Why, good morning! . . . Certainly. She'll be delighted! . . . That's too bad! Sudden, isn't it? . . . Oh, I see. I'm glad for you, of course . . . Ten-thirty? . . . All right. I'll tell her . . . Sorry I won't see you again . . . Good-by."

He snapped the receiver into its hook and strolled back into the dining-room where his mother now sat alone. Breakfast had been very prompt. He was reveling in the luxury of a few spare minutes.

"The widow's coming over this morning," he informed her.

"This morning? Goodness gracious! I have a million things to see to for the W. P. C. meeting to-night."

"To-night?" Winthrop questioned in surprise.

"Yes. Men's Night. Have you forgotten about it?"

"George! I had. I made an engagement —"

"Which will have to be unmade," his mother interrupted decisively. "You promised me first, Win."

"Don't look at me in that tone of voice, mater!" he implored in pretended fright. "I'll be dodging your slipper, next! Of course I'll unmake it. But honestly, mother, I think, if you'll excuse the elegance of the expression, that you W. P. C.'s are biting off more than you can chew in your efforts to build a club-room. Not one of you is rich — now," he modified his statement with a sigh, "and to try to do a thing of this sort on nothing seems like dipping soup with a fork."

"Possibly it is," she agreed imperturbably, "but we'll keep on with the fork until we get a ladle, that's all. We are going to appeal to the men to-night."

"A touching appeal, I'll warrant!" he commented with a significant laugh.

"Yes, it is, and we've chosen the surest way to their hearts — via their stomachs. That reminds me, I must get up something nice for lunch. Katy's ironing."

"I don't think Mrs. Walter will stay to lunch. She starts for Australia this afternoon."

"This afternoon? Why, isn't that pretty sudden?"

"I suppose so, but still I don't see why she should stay on here. She intends to stop over in London and Paris on her way home, I believe."

"I'm sorry to have her go, poor thing! I hoped to see more of her, but it must be lonesome for her here. I don't see what she finds to do all day long, unless she goes sightseeing with that companion of hers. I can't understand your aunt's antipathy to her," she went on. "She saw her just once but she's ranted against her ever since. She declares she only married Walter for his money. If Mig were as crazy over the money as she seemed at first, I could understand it, but she's not. Why, she's going at her school work as though it were a long-lost friend. I do hope she won't come home to lunch if Mrs. Walter stays. She sits and eyes the poor woman like a cat watching a mouse. I almost expect to see her spring at her. Mrs. Walter feels it, too, I can tell. It makes her nervous. She says she's keenly sensitive

to dislike, and Mig's attitude is certainly far from friendly."

"Perhaps Miggy's like the dog in the manger," Winthrop suggested with a laugh; "she don't want the bone herself but she's determined that no one else shall have it either. That's not a good figure, though; no bone about that — it was solid meat." He sighed involuntarily. The sound brought a troubled look into his mother's eyes.

"You still think I ought to have kept the money," she asserted, almost defiantly. "Do you believe, deep down in your heart, that Walter would have left me more than a small legacy, if he had had the chance to make a new will? Do you? And would you respect your mother if she took advantage of that terrible accident to deprive his wife of her rightful inheritance, or even of a large part of it? Would you?" she repeated, fiercely. "You know you wouldn't! You couldn't! I'm doing what I know is right, and you know it, too. If Mrs. Walter decides to — but there's time enough to accept when the offer is made. She's probably waiting to talk the matter over with the lawyer. Perhaps that's why she's going back so soon, bless her dear heart."

"You're the most confirmed optimist I ever came across," Winthrop declared, giving her a frank hug as he spoke. "You'd find some good even in a Jersey mosquito!"

"You haven't answered my questions, son," she persisted quietly.

"Well, the will was made in good faith. Of course," he hastened to add, as he saw her straighten

up, "circumstances arose, later, that changed things materially, I know, but still — Walt always worshiped you, mater. I'm sure he wouldn't begrudge — Pshaw! it's all over and settled, so what's the use of holding a post-mortem? Mrs. Walter's trumped one of your aces, and if you choose to discard the others, why I suppose it's no one's business but your own. My view's a 'one for the company — two for me,' one, probably. I know how Marjory loves luxuries and it makes me wild to think what we might have had if —"

"I know what a sensible little woman Marjory is," his mother interrupted. "She'll be just as contented with her simple home as she would be with a grand one and all the fripperies, as Aunt Mig calls them — perhaps more so. She's true blue, Win."

He bent over and kissed her with hurried tenderness, but she clung to him as he started away, her eyes raised in piteous uncertainty. She yearned for his approval.

"Win, dear; don't make me feel that I've robbed my boys in trying to be fair to that forlorn woman. That will was made long before he dreamed of getting married. Put yourself in Walter's place, dear. If anything happened to you, would you want strangers to take the bulk of your money away from Marjory? If I insisted on claiming my share — oh! I know, she'd still have enough, but that has nothing to do with it, nothing! It would seem like demanding payment for the home we gave him so freely. I couldn't do it, Win: I couldn't!"

"Well, it's queer she hasn't said something defi-

nite. I hope she won't forget all you're giving up."

"I hope she won't. I'm sure she won't. I confess that I'll accept a part joyfully." Her glance roved about the shabby hall. "I can use some of it to advantage, too. The piazzas need rebuilding, for one thing. She hinted at heavy burdens, so I suppose she referred to bills for doctors, and nurses, and traveling expenses. Her mother was sick for years, and they went from place to place in search of health for her."

"No use crying over spilled milk," he commented philosophically. "She hasn't committed herself in any way, but perhaps her intentions are good; let's hope so. I'm off, mother. Tell her good-by for me." He opened the door as he spoke, and added: "There's my girlie waiting for me."

"And my poor little girlie's waiting for me by this time," Mrs. Porter thought with genuine compunction, as she hurried into the kitchen and prepared a dainty breakfast for Mystery. She carried the tray up-stairs herself, disregarding Katy's good-natured attempts to relieve her of it. No response greeted her gentle knock so she quietly turned the knob. To her surprise the door was locked. For the first time since she had come to them Mystery had shut her out. It hurt her in spite of herself. It worried her, too.

"Are you awake, dearie?" she called softly, through the keyhole, "I've brought up your breakfast."

"I'm not hungry," a weary voice, totally unlike Mystery's low clear tones, responded to her urging.

"Just eat a little, honey," she pleaded. "I've poached two beautiful eggs for you. Won't you try, dear? It will do you good."

"I can't! Oh! please don't make me. I can't! I just want to keep quiet awhile; may I?"

"All right." But she hurried down to the telephone, nevertheless, and was just in time to catch Dr. Guthrie as he was starting on his morning round. She told him the little she knew.

"Let her absolutely alone," he commanded. "Perhaps some glimmer of memory has come to her and she's wrestling for more. But if she's not better and willing to take nourishment by to-night, let me know. Memory or no memory we can't have her sick on our hands. And don't you worry, you Martha of many cares!" he added dictatorially. "Missy's not the frail big-eyed bag of bones she was when she first came to you, remember, thanks to her good mother."

"And to her faithful doctor," she amended promptly.

He laughed, not at all displeased, then added: "I suppose I've got to appear at that W. P. C. shindig to-night. Oh! you women! you women! No rest for the weary —"

"Not if they have fat purses."

"Can't you show mercy to a busy man? Do you know, Madam Porter, that my attendance to-night will mean coming without my supper?"

"A mere detail, doctor; we'll give you food for thought. But if it meant coming without your cheque-book — well, that would be really serious!" she retorted.

"Of all the hard-hearted wretches!" he muttered, as she cut off the connection and set about her morning's tasks. She worked with a heavy heart, sorely missing the bright young companionship to which she had become accustomed, and realizing more keenly than ever before, how greatly her housekeeping duties had been lightened of late, under Mystery's management. The girl had gradually taken the more onerous tasks upon her young shoulders, leaving Mrs. Porter a leisure that was as welcome as it was unusual. Not that she would have relinquished her home cares for the world — life would not have been worth living without them — but she was "getting no younger very fast," as she herself whimsically expressed it, and trotting up and down, and in and out, in the performance of the innumerable little tasks that spell housekeeping, tasks that are absolutely necessary to keep the home machinery from creaking, was becoming more of a burden than she liked to confess, even to herself, and she was a woman who had few reserves with her own soul. She looked herself in the glass, wrinkles, gray hair, double chin, stout form and all, and bravely smiled at the message they brought her. Her optimism, whether it embraced the Jersey mosquito or not, certainly never lowered its flag at the bidding of old age.

Just as she finished clearing up the dining-room and arranging the table for lunch, the door-bell rang.

"Mercy! It can't be half-past ten already!" she exclaimed, remembering, with dismay, the lunch dessert still awaiting her manipulation. "Where on earth has the morning gone!"

With a hearty "Come right in!" she threw wide the door, but instead of the widow's sable-draped figure, a tall, bearded man confronted her.

"Mrs. Porter live here?" he inquired in hoarse tones.

"I am Mrs. Porter," she replied, beginning a mental arrangement of her batteries against encyclopedias, sewing-machines, filters, or vacuum cleaners, in spite of the fact that no business-like sample case was in evidence. "I'm sorry, but I'm engaged to-day—" She hesitated, struck by his emaciated look, and added gently: "What can I do for you?"

With a curt remark about seeing her "on business," the caller deliberately brushed past her and entered the hall. She turned, her pity changed to indignation, only to find him gazing at her through tear-dimmed eyes.

"Don't you know me?" his voice was husky with emotion, but there was a familiar note in it that went straight to her heart.

"Walter!"

With a cry of joy she was gathered close in his arms.

"Oh, Walter! Walter! And we thought you were dead!" she murmured, tears of thankfulness streaming from her eyes.

"I thought so, too," he replied, attempting to laugh lightly but not succeeding very well. "Davy Jones almost had me in his locker. I guess I was as nearly drowned as any one who lives to tell the tale."

"But how — Oh! I can't realize it! Is it really you, Walter, or am I dreaming?"

"If you dreamed this," touching his sunken cheek, "it would be a nightmare. Come and sit down," he added solicitously, as he felt the nervous trembling she was trying hard to conquer. Without waiting for her assent he led her into the cheery sitting-room, where the bright sunshine and the canaries singing lustily in their gilded cages were vying with the vivid green of the plants that filled the wide southern bay-window, in an effort to delude the beholder into the belief that it was early summer, not sere and yellow autumn. Still holding her hands in his strong nervous clasp, he placed her tenderly on the wide, old couch that had done yeoman service for years. When they were seated side by side, he put his arm about her. The act, reminiscent as it was, of their parting, loosed the flood-gates. Her head went down on his shoulder; she sobbed aloud in her great joy.

"Why didn't you write to us?" she was beginning reproachfully, after she had recovered from the first stress of emotion; but a glance into the haggard face so close to her own made her regret the question. In spite of the friendly offices of the beard, his cheeks showed sunken and sallow, his eyes were dull, lifeless; even his attitude, as he sat with stooping shoulders, a huddled mass of skin and bones, proclaimed a soul to whom life had become a burden instead of a treasure. She reached over and patted his cheek, exclaiming in pitying tones: "You poor, poor boy! How you must have suffered!"

"Suffered!" he repeated with grim emphasis. "I've been through hell itself. But I had my little taste of Heaven first. They can't take that away from me."

His tone was reckless, defiant, in its bitterness, altogether unlike the quiet, self-contained Walter of earlier days. Mrs. Porter shrank involuntarily. He noted the gesture, slight though it was, and went on in a milder tone, though still full of repressed resentment. Life had not treated him fairly. Its injustice had embittered him, but he tried to disguise it for her sake.

"I'm sorry I hurt you, mother." The old name slipped out unconsciously. "Perhaps I've grown hard, lately — I suppose I have — but I've worked like a dog since I left here, and what do I get for it? Nothing! Not one thing! Just as I reach the fulfillment of my life's dreams, hopes, ambitions, I find — this!"

"But why didn't you come home when you were not succeeding? You surely knew that we would receive you with open arms. You never even wrote to us," she ended reproachfully.

"I know I didn't, but don't hold it against me, mother. I kept waiting from day to day, from week to week, in the hope of having good news to send."

"But you succeeded," she interrupted in jubilant tones.

"Yes, I succeeded. Much good success has done me! When I reached my first goal, the next, a far better one, seemed so near I delayed in order to write of that, too. It was poor reasoning, perhaps, but I

never once forgot you. You believe that, surely you do."

"Of course I do. We've had proof enough of that, if we needed it."

"Proof?" He looked at her in a puzzled fashion.

"Why, yes, the will."

"The will?"

"Your will — don't you remember? The lawyer wrote us about the fortune."

"By George! Of course he would, thinking that I was lost."

"And we'll never forget it," she assured him warmly. "It showed that you thought of us. And to think that you made all that money in a few short years!"

"The 'few short years' seemed an eternity to me," he corrected.

"But you're rich, now —"

"Yes, now that I have nothing left to live for," he finished, with a hopeless shake of his head.

"Nothing to live for?" she echoed, in wide-eyed amazement. "Why, Walter —"

"It would be different if my wife —" he choked and added gloomily: "No use harrowing your feelings with my woes."

Then, for the first time, Mrs. Porter grasped the situation in all its joyous entirety. The startling occurrence of the morning — this resurrection from the dead, as it were — had completely filled her mind to the exclusion of all other happenings. His mention of his wife, the dreary resignation of his words, suddenly cleared her vision.

"Oh, Walter," she began excitedly, then she changed her mind, and by a resolute effort of will power, kept back the glad tidings.

"Joy never kills," she thought, fairly throbbing with the desire to shout aloud. "She'll be here in a little while. It won't hurt him to wait one more half-hour for the sake of such a joyful reunion, bless his heart! Oh! if he had come to-morrow, after she sailed! Thank God that he has such comfort in store for him!"

"Tell me about it, dear." She tried to speak indifferently but her agitation was apparent, even to him. He studied her face curiously, for a moment, before replying. It flushed and paled under his scrutiny in a way he did not understand. "You were married, you say?"

He told her the whole story. It was the widow's account in every detail lacking the one great one — his wife's rescue. She listened with eager interest, her hands clenched tight in her lap, her lips shut into a hard straight line in her effort to keep from betraying her previous knowledge. In speaking of his earlier struggles, he said in tones of concentrated passion: "But I won out, in spite of everything. Fate couldn't keep me from it, but she got her revenge, later. I won wealth, yes; but I lost all that makes life worth living."

It seemed as though she must shout out "No! no! no! Not lost! Saved!" but she conquered the impulse. A furtive glance at the grandfather's clock in the hall showed her that it was almost ten-thirty. The widow — a widow no

longer — was due in a few minutes. She broke into eager questioning to relieve her feelings.

"But how were you saved without people knowing it? I thought — we heard — the lawyer didn't know you were rescued. Didn't the ship go down?"

"Went down like lead," he replied, gazing somberly at the faded rug beneath his feet, but seeing a wide, tossing waste of angry waves that towered toward heaven, then broke, hissing and foaming about the hidden reef, dashing the luckless objects in their grasp against its rocky reach with relentless fury. And those objects — crushed masses of flesh and bone, with sightless eyes and tossing limbs, that a few minutes before had been living, breathing sailors. . . . The picture sickened him.

"We were helpless," he went on in suppressed tones, reverting to the night of the wreck. "The small boats had been swept away, all except one, and that was swamped as the sailors crowded into it. But I managed to fasten her — my wife — to one of the cabin doors. The only thing that gave me courage to launch the frail raft in that tossing inferno was the knowledge that our one chance lay in getting out of reach of the whirlpool that would follow the sinking of the ship; for she was sinking fast, the captain warned us. I intended to drop down beside her, but before I could carry out my purpose the door was swirled about by a giant wave and lifted far beyond my reach. An instant later I saw it disappear — forever. I managed to grasp a piece of wreckage and twist its floating ropes about me. That's all I remember until I came to my senses,

several days later, and found myself in a rude hut in one of the islands that are inhabited only by natives. To think that I — I alone — should be saved, and she — God knows how little value I set on my life."

"Oh, hush!" she implored, wiping the tears from her eyes. "Hush! You don't know! You don't understand! If you did, you'd — It's all God's goodness. You'll be sorry — glad —" Then she broke down utterly, overmastered by a mingling of sorrow for the man as he was then, and thanksgiving for the joy in store for him, that found its outlet in a paroxysm of sobs. The sound of a motor stopping before the gate recalled her to herself. She made an effort to explain without actually telling her secret. "I must break the news gently — You know we thought — I — I mean — sh — the rest don't know yet. Stay here until I call you, please, Walter. Some one is coming to — to — Excuse me, dear — there's the door-bell! I'll be back in a minute. I must explain — Don't open the door, please. Don't — open — the — door!"

She pushed him back into his seat and hurried from the room, shutting the door after her with a forcefulness that shook the house, but her agitation was not surprising under the circumstances; a man and a woman — both back from the dead — and she the one to break the glad news! It was enough to upset the calmest nerves, yet she would not have missed the opportunity for all the world.

Walter had half risen but he sank back on the couch in astonished obedience. Was this excited

lady the unruffled Mother Porter of his fond dreams? He felt defrauded, somehow, but as he looked about the room, a smile gradually broke the hard straight line of his colorless lips. It broadened into a laugh as his gaze roved from one familiar object to another, finally resting upon the old couch on which he was marooned, by order of the admiral.

"Jiminy!" he exclaimed, with a boyish chuckle, as he inserted his fingers into the crevice between the seat and the back, with the ease of long habit, and carefully explored its entire length. "I wonder —" Just then his fingers reached the turn at one arm and triumphantly closed over an object they found there. It was a tarnished dime surrounded by bits of fluff.

"The Kid's not onto his privileges!" he exclaimed. "Win and I never forgot our house-cleaning, at least as far as this blessed old sofa was concerned. We knew a good thing when we saw it. But then Ches has a monopoly: he can afford to take it easy. With us it was first come, first served! I'll try my luck again."

This time the inquisitive fingers made the turn at the other arm, without any salvage to reward them, but just before they reached the end of the space they came in contact with a metallic object. It proved elusive, but assiduous efforts resulted in its capture.

"A half dollar! We'd have thought we were millionaires if we'd made a find like this! Yes, sir, millionaires!" Suddenly his smile disappeared. He fell into a frowning study. "She mentioned Mr.

Tuttle and the will — I wonder — oh! it can't be! it's impossible! But she seemed so excited, so surprised — and she said something about 'breaking it gently!' Gently! Ah! so that's it! It was the money she was thinking of. By God! I seem to be fated!" He rose to his feet and tramped back and forth, in his agony. "Back from the grave itself and my only friends sorry to see me! All on account of that cursed money! Bah! what do I care for it, now, without her — without a friend in the world —"

A day, even an hour earlier, he would have thought that nothing could shake his faith in these friends of his friendless boyhood, in this motherly angel who had ministered to him in the desert of his affliction; but those few words, in the light of this later knowledge, had blasted his mountain of trust and love into a powder that threatened to choke out all desire for life. He stopped his restless march and sank back on the couch with an impotent curse, then put his head down on the familiar arm while great tearless sobs shook him from head to foot. It was not a pleasant sight, this, a soul in its extremity! Heaven and earth seemed to be slipping away from him, leaving only a black, unpierceable, inimicable void behind them.

Just at this point Mrs. Porter opened the door.

"Go into the par — oh! my boy! my boy! what is it? Tell mother!"

In an instant, she was on her knees before him, patting the bowed head with soothing touch, and murmuring caressing epithets into his ear. To her he

was once more the broken-hearted lad mourning his nearest and dearest, and facing with what courage he could muster, the lonely years that lay before him. At the sound of her voice, the touch of her loving mother-hand, all his ugly suspicions vanished. In a flash he knew that nothing would ever again shake his trust. Whatever the news she had to break "gently," it had its birth in no sordid consideration. As the blessed certainty was borne in upon him, he raised his head and looked straight into her kindly eyes, his own filled with a mute appeal for pardon.

"I know, dear! I know! But it's all right. Go into the parlor, Walter. Hurry! There's some one there who wants — you want — I didn't break it after all — I couldn't. Oh! go! go! And God bless you — both!"

He obeyed. He had no choice. She fairly propelled him towards his goal, but when they reached the closed door of the parlor she turned back, and burying her head in the cushions of the old couch laughed and cried, and finally prayed herself into composure. Then she sat there smiling, her heart with the reunited lovers in the room beyond.

CHAPTER XV

DROPPED FROM THE CASTE

"Would you that spangle of Existence spend
About the Secret — quick about it, Friend!
A Hair perhaps divides the False and True . . ."

Walter opened the door and strode into the parlor, confidently expecting to see Chester or even Aunt Mig. In her excitement Mrs. Porter would have been quite capable of summoning Winthrop himself had there been time. At first there seemed to be no one in the room and he was about to leave, when a slight rustling back of the curtains that draped the old-fashioned glass doors leading to the piazza, attracted his attention. Then, for the first time he saw behind them the figure of a woman outlined against the background of the brightly lighted window. She was heavily veiled, and her form was muffled in a long, black fur motor-coat.

"This view of the harbor fascinates me," she murmured plaintively, still gazing out over the sun-flecked water, her attention riveted upon a giant steamer with four huge stacks, that was making its majestic way toward the Narrows, dwarfing all the craft it passed by its tremendous length. "That liner must be the *Lusitania*. Isn't she magnificent? The bay is beautiful, beautiful! but it hurts me in

spite of its beauty. It recalls too vividly my terrible experience." She drew in her breath sharply as she spoke.

At the first sound of her low, compelling voice, Walter started in surprise. There was something familiar about it, or was it his imagination?

"Mrs. Porter told me that an old friend wished to see me," he explained hurriedly. "That is, I understood — a mistake on my part, evidently. Pardon my intrusion." He turned to leave the room when her voice arrested him.

"Will you be kind enough to send Mrs. Porter to me?" She consulted her watch anxiously as she added: "My time is limited. I start for Australia this afternoon."

"For Australia?" he questioned in startled tones. "Why, that's been my home for years. May I ask your name?"

"Certainly," she replied graciously, emerging from the shelter of the curtains as she spoke. "I am Mrs. William Husted."

He stared in unbelieving silence for an instant, then with one stride he was beside her and had seized her wrist in no gentle grip.

"You lie!" he thundered, his voice coming with a hissing sound through his clenched teeth.

"How dare you!" Her indignant eyes sought his, then dropped before the blazing fury they found there. "You are — are —"

"I am! Now who are you?" He spoke in tense tones, but his first overmastering fury was past; he had himself well under control.

"If you will have the kindness to let go my wrist I'll introduce myself. Ah! thank you! I'm not anxious to be 'in touch' with any one who has a grip like that." She broke into a peal of hysterical merriment which she tried in vain to check. "Oh! this is rich! Not many women can laugh when they see a million vanishing into the dim distance. The denouement! Fake wife at center. Enter husband, unexpectedly resurrected from the dead! Great situation, isn't it?"

"May I ask what all this nonsense means?" he demanded sternly.

"You may! I heard your story, and decided I'd try a star rôle in my own company — the inconsolable (for the time being) widow of a millionaire. I am Mrs. William Husted at your service." She courtesied mockingly before him, a bright spot of color burning in either cheek, her great, slumbrous black eyes flashing with unwonted fire.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, his voice so hoarse his words were almost unintelligible.

"Just what I say. I am, or was, rather, up to the time of your inopportune entrance, the sorrowing widow — sod, mind you, not grass — no! that's wrong! It would be sand, wouldn't it, if you had stayed 'put,' as you ought to have done — of Mr. William Husted, alias Walter Warren, deceased millionaire of Australia. Witness my weeds! Becoming, don't you think?"

He stared at her in genuine bewilderment. Who was she? Where had he seen her before? Or was it an accidental resemblance to some one —

"What are you doing here?"

"Playing my part, that's all. The setting happens to be this particular suburb of your great metropolis."

"But —"

"I'm understudy to your wife —No!" as he advanced towards her threateningly, "don't get excited, please! I mean no disrespect to the dead. She was taken from the company before I cast myself for her part. I may be reckless and fond of money, but I've not sunk so low as that — yet! Heaven knows where I'll land now." The last words were muttered under her breath.

"But who are you? Why did you come here — to America?" he persisted.

She replied with an airy flippancy her trembling lips denied.

"Oh! the scene shifted, that was all! The widow, after her miraculous rescue from the wreck — Act One — comes to claim her husband's fortune which had been handed over to these good people here under the impression that there was no other claimant. That lawyer of yours didn't even know of my — pardon me — your wife's existence, until I proved it to him! I also proved to his satisfaction that she had not gone down with her husband. I suppose I ought to say 'up' though; at least it sounds more comfortable, from all accounts. I —" A glance at his face checked her untimely levity.

"Who are you?" he demanded again, his voice sternly uncompromising.

"Don't you remember me? You're an Austra-

lian; you've surely seen me before. Look hard; I'm used to it."

"No. Wait a moment! Your face seems familiar, but —"

"Think a minute! But no — you won't recall me in this sedate setting, clothed in these trappings of woe. If you saw me at the Friv —"

"The 'Enchantress'!" The name left his lips without volition on his part.

"Ah, I see you do remember me. Like all good Australians you've condescended to vaudeville, it seems."

"And you — a variety actress — have dared to lay claim to my money, to rob —"

"I have robbed no one!" she contradicted fiercely. "I knew nothing of these people when I planned it. They were expecting nothing, and would have been none the wiser if I had only played my cards more rapidly."

"But my wife!" he exclaimed with equal ferocity. "What about her?"

"What use is a fortune to a woman at the bottom of the sea? She didn't need it; I did!"

"And you dared to palm yourself off as my wife —"

"Pardon me, no — as the wife of your ghost! No live husband for me, thank you; I value my liberty too highly. I've read of the sea giving up its dead, but I never expected to witness it. Since you were inconsiderate enough to allow yourself to be Jonahed, I think it's time for a quick curtain. You've taken my scene away from me. It's too bad

because I really never had a more congenial rôle, setting aside all monetary considerations. I was actually beginning to feel sort of good and refined, really I was. I could shudder quite realistically at the thought of those abandoned creatures who dance and sing in airy attire for the benefit of a misguided public! And after all, I'll have to join the ranks again! Hm!"

She had spoken throughout with reckless bravado, her low voice hard and repellent. She realized her situation to the full. She had made a bid higher than she was prepared to play, and her opponent bade fair to score enormous penalties. Well! that's to be expected if one ventures into the Auction of life: she would try to save as many tricks as possible, but it looked like a Grand Slam — for him.

"And you could stoop to such deception as this!" he commented contemptuously.

"Stoop? After the life I've lived? Why, I soared! The part suited me to perfection. Don't I look it? And I've played it well, too. Perhaps a little carelessness of detail in New York — it's a tempting place, isn't it? — but none of these innocents over here were the wiser for that."

"How under Heaven did you conceive such a scheme as this?" He was gazing at her with a look of incredulous horror that drove her on to greater recklessness. The hand was played, and she had turned no trick; she might as well help him sum up his winning score. She began her sorry story in a defiant way that unconsciously changed to a passionate plea for extenuation before she reached the end.

"My sister first put the idea into my head; my virtuous sister, one of those Christians — you know the kind — so straight they almost fall over backwards! She was the real instigator, unconsciously, you understand; she'd expire immediately at the mere suggestion! But then she was always good, so good it made me want to go where she wasn't going — wherever that was! She was the nurse who took care of your wife's mother." Walter started involuntarily. "I see you remember her. It was through her I learned all about the hurried marriage of her patient's daughter followed by the wreck and the death of both bride and groom. Her words, as she finished, telling me the story, seemed to burn into my brain."

"What words?"

"'A grand fortune like that, and no one to claim it!' Then it occurred to me that my chance had come. I was down on my luck just then, worn out by a nasty spell of sickness, worried to death by creditors, and still worse, hounded by men who — oh! I can't bear to speak of it." A quick indrawing of the breath attested to the effort she was making to control her emotion. "They called themselves men but they were beasts of prey! And dancing before my eyes was this glorious mirage — a star part after my own heart; one that could be put on regardless of expense, and best of all, a dead 'angel' as a backer — an angel who could never rise up and demand his pound of flesh!

"I couldn't resist. I accepted the part but I determined not to disgrace the character. And I

haven't — I swear to you. Nothing has made me forget what was due to Mrs. William Husted. The name is as clean and unstained as it was the night your ship went down and she disappeared forever. I wish I were with her!"

She swept back and forth restlessly. For a moment it seemed that her wonderful self-control was going, but she caught herself up short and went on as though she had determined to spare herself not at all.

"My sister's patient died when the terrible news of the wreck reached her. Her death removed my last scruple; it was tottering to its fall before, I confess. I set to work then and deliberately planned the whole thing. I thought I had all the details so complete there was no possibility of failure; but who ever dreamed that my 'angel' would be inconsiderate enough to come to life and discharge me? Just when I've brought my part to perfection, too, and expected to play to S. R. O. houses! Perfect as my plans were, I couldn't arrange to hold you down at the bottom of the sea, now could I? Well, it's all in a lifetime, I suppose! I've done my best, but the play's to be taken off and I'm not to be paid — or perhaps I'll get more than I bargained for," she added, glancing at him anxiously. "I don't care! I haven't a single illusion as to the enormity of the crime I've committed. It's no Sunday-school offense, of that I'm perfectly well aware. I went into it with my eyes open, and I don't propose to cringe and beg for mercy. To the victim belongs the right to scourge!"

She laughed, but his keen ear detected the tremor of fear beneath her mirth.

"Tell me, you say you were sailing to-day? What did you intend to do when you reached Australia? Did you propose to drag my wife's name through the mire —"

"No!" she protested in sharp distress. "It was Mrs. William Husted returning, not the 'Enchantress.' I intended to go abroad as soon as things were settled. But it's all over now, last act finished, curtain down, and the applause — well, I don't seem to hear it, do you? At least it's not vociferous."

"What will you do now?" he asked in a gentler tone than he had yet used. She studied his face intently before answering.

"God knows!" she replied, with a shrug. "I don't, unless —" Again she studied the sallow, sunken face with its lack-luster eyes, and the despairing droop of the mouth — studied it as though trying to pierce the very soul of the man.

"Unless?" he repeated tentatively. Her answer was so low he had to bend his ear to hear it.

"Unless we accept a curtain call — together."

"What do you mean?" He frowned as he asked the question. He was non-plused by her theatrical parlance.

"Pool the issues! Carry out the farce — on the face of it, I mean. You look as though life didn't mean much to you; why not help me out and let me take care of you? She's dead. It can't hurt her — now!"

"What!" His breath came in suffocating gasps

as he tried to believe the evidence of his ears. He felt an impulse to strike her. "Do you suppose I'd put a woman like you in the place of my innocent little girl-wife, even for an hour? Oh, shame! shame!"

She cringed before the contempt in his eyes.

"No, of course you couldn't do it. I was foolish even to dream —"

For the first time she broke down utterly. Sinking to her knees, she buried her head in the old winged armchair, sobbing in choking gasps that seemed to tear her very soul.

"Another evidence of her histrionic ability!" flashed through Walter's mind. This was the woman who had drawn all Australia to her feet by her beauty, her compelling voice, her subtle fascination. He tried to steel himself against her; to remember the crime of which she was guilty; but in spite of himself the pity of it all crowded out his anger. After an instant of suspicion the realization was borne in upon him that here was the very abandonment of despair; on that he would have staked his life itself.

His hands clenched and unclenched nervously. He made an impulsive movement towards her then halted abruptly, but the misery of the woman conquered his distaste for the schemer. He put himself in her place long enough to realize the overmastering temptation that had come to her.

"Don't!" he urged awkwardly, laying his hand upon her bowed head. "Please don't! You — you'll make yourself sick." As he spoke, he lifted

her up and placed her in the armchair with gentle solicitude. "I want to help you in spite of — She — my wife — would be the first to urge it. She was the soul of love and tenderness. If I put you beyond the reach of those creditors, will you go back and try to keep — straight?" He flushed with a pure man's embarrassment.

"You don't intend to punish me? It was a crime, a serious crime. My — a friend masquerading as the rector, when the lawyer interviewed him, and I forged the deposition of your wife's mother." She seemed determined to let him know the worst. "But I won't touch a cent of your money," she added, in a tone of grim determination.

"You will!" he contradicted masterfully; "for the sake of the pure little girl whose name you have borne all these weeks. Let it be her gift to a sister in distress. If you had known her, as I did, you would understand how gladly she would welcome this opportunity to help you start over again."

She shook her head.

"Will you explain to Mrs. Porter and ask her not to judge me too harshly? If I had had a mother like that perhaps — But my mother died when I was born, and my sister — Some women are too good; they take up so much room they crowd us off the straight and narrow path. Crowd? They push us off. But a few are like Mrs. Porter — and your wife — the kind that move over to make room beside them. I could preach a sermon on that text that would make many a smug 'good' woman sit up and take notice! Thank you for dealing so

leniently with me. You deserve happiness if ever a man did; but that's the kind that usually gets the husks in this world. The Potter works unfairly; the weaker vessels get the hardest thumps — or so it seems to me. But I'm afraid I'm one of those 'luckless Pots he marr'd in making!' Tell Mrs. Porter good-by for me. I don't want to see her; I couldn't bear it."

Before he realized her intention, she had slipped through the door and was hurrying rapidly down the path. He stood still for a moment, dazed, then hurried after her, but was just in time to see her car vanish around the turn of the avenue. For good or ill she had gone out of his life forever.

Meanwhile Mrs. Porter awaited Walter's return or his summons, in a fever of impatience. More than once she started up to join the happy pair, as she pictured them, but each time she heroically restrained herself even at the very door. She vented her restlessness in arranging and rearranging the ornaments and books in the room; she tried the effect of different pieces of furniture in new places, then moved them back to their customary stands; she dusted assiduously, even where no trace of dust was visible. Finally, in unconscious imitation of her younger son in his moments of boyish stress, she fell to pacing up and down, whistling softly under her breath, and snapping her fingers as an accompaniment to her restless parade.

With Spartan denial she refrained from intruding upon the sacred reunion even when she heard the front door open and close. "If they want me,

they'll call me or come to me," was her unselfish reasoning. "I wouldn't shorten their bit of Paradise by one second, bless them!"

At this point in her happy meditations the sitting-room door opened and Walter himself stood before her. One glance at his stern, set face told volumes, but they not joyous ones. An unaccountable tremor ran over her. Her spirits sank; a nameless dread took possession of her. This was no bridegroom rejoicing in the resurrection of his loved one, this gloomy-faced man whose eyes avoided hers, whose whole attitude bespoke dejection and despair. She was bewildered by so strange a finale to the reunion she had planned with such thankfulness and joy. Even her optimism could read no lightened grief into the attitude of the man before her. She tried twice to speak, to find out what untoward event had marred her perfect plan, but her throat was dry, her lips twitched nervously, refusing to do her bidding.

"Where is — your wife?" she finally managed to gasp.

"Dead!" he replied, with an indrawing of the breath that betrayed his pain.

"Dead? Oh! impossible! She was —"

"An impostor!" he finished with savage emphasis. Then the remembrance of the woman's despair as she told her pitiful story, modified his tone. "Lured on by the prospect of a fortune, poor soul!" he supplemented briefly.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed in shocked contradiction. "This is terrible! Oh! you poor, poor lad-

die! To have your hopes raised to Heaven only to be dashed down after all."

"I had no hopes raised. You forget that I saw my wife go down. But I'm sorry for you. She asked me to explain it to you. She wants you to think of her as kindly as possible. What she has become is the fault of her environment, poor thing."

"But who is she?"

"A vaudeville performer known from one end of Australia to the other for her beauty, her voice and her utter indifference to all the laws of convention."

Then he told her the story without embellishment of any kind. To Mrs. Porter, leading the simple, open life of a suburban woman, such deception seemed stupendous, yet with characteristic kindliness she reminded herself that the temptation must have been overwhelming, and no word of blame escaped her lips.

"I wish I could have talked to her before she left," she sighed wistfully. "I might have helped her, poor girl."

"You have helped her," Walter assured her earnestly. "She fairly reverences you. For your sake she's going to try to keep straight from now on. Whether she succeeds or not remains to be seen. Her life has certainly not fitted her to stand against temptation."

"Then you're not going to — to —"

"No. I suppose I'm taking the wrong attitude, but I can't bring myself to prosecute a woman like that. She's had everything against her from the start — a mere plaything of fate. This may prove

the turning point in her life. Still — well, we'll hope for the best."

"And to think that my beautiful surprise turned out this way." Mrs. Porter tried to speak lightly, but her eyes were brimming with tears. "You'll have to grit your teeth, my laddie, and take a new grip on life. We don't always understand things — perhaps He doesn't intend that we should — but remember: 'God's in his Heaven: all's right with the world!'"

Her simple faith affected him strongly. He felt that here was a Christ-follower, a real Christian. There was silence between them for a few moments, the intimate silence that is friendship's strongest proof, then he broke the tension by remarking almost with a chuckle: "That money of mine seems to have had a whole ball of string tied to it, as far as you were concerned. First one piece jerked by — her, then another by me. You poor, defrauded lady! I intend to go halvers —"

"Walter, no! Positively no! I wouldn't accept it if you did. I'm not crazy," she assured him, "so don't look so startled. But if you knew what I've endured since we received Mr. Tuttle's letter! I want what I want when I want it, whether rich people have it or not. I haven't the faintest desire to be a millionaire. I can't begin all over again at my time of life; I can't, so don't ask me to. I wasn't cut out for one of the '400'! Don't make me rich, I beg of you."

He stared at her in amazement. Her vehemence took him by surprise. Her agitation, and the im-

ploring tone in which she preferred her unusual request, added to his bewilderment.

"I tried once to live up to a fortune for Mig's sake," she explained, "and it was the hardest month I've ever put through. That was before the money came, mind you; what would it have been afterwards! We shouldn't have dared to call our souls our own. But I'm truly grateful to you, Walter, only don't let Mig know about this. She seems to be fully recovered, but she might have a relapse!"

If her explanation of Miss Mig's campaign had been purposely exaggerated it had its effect; Walter laughed heartily. It did her good to hear him. But a moment later he again reverted to the topic under discussion. "Surely you'll let me do something for you," he pleaded. "There's another side to it, you know; you mustn't forget the boys. How about Chester? Chosen his college, yet? And the old house needs attention, too. I can see that with half an eye."

"I'll gladly accept a share, because I know you're in earnest in your offer, but it must be on the installment plan, remember; no lump sums for me. A burnt child dreads the fire, you know. And no 'halvers,' either. Why," she added whimsically, "in my weakened condition I couldn't stand even half the strain I've been through."

"As you please," he asserted, gloom once more settling heavily upon him. "The money means little to me now. It seems to be under the ban, too, when even my best friends refuse it! Do you know, Fate picked me out for her hardest knocks! Just

as the cup of fulfillment reached my lips, it was dashed aside ruthlessly. Oh! I know," as she tried to remonstrate, "I know all that you're going to say: I have youth, and health and strength — or I will have as soon as I have a chance to recuperate — and I ought to be glad I'm living, but I'm not!"

"Walter!"

"Why should I be?" he questioned savagely. "When the *Dunkirk* went down and my little love was lost, I was lost, too. At least I lost all interest in life. I wish you could have seen her, mother. I was bringing her to you. And to think —" She turned away to allow him to recover himself. She herself was crying unrestrainedly. "I can't realize it even yet." . . .

CHAPTER XVI

THE NEW LEADING LADY

". . . And thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness —
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow! "

Mrs. Porter spent a busy afternoon over the final arrangements for the W. P. C. entertainment to be held that evening. She suggested, advised, rearranged, ordered and countermanded as need arose, but through it all her heart was with the returned wanderer. The sad ending to his honeymoon brought the tears to her eyes more than once, even in the midst of the most exacting conclaves. She thought of Mystery, too, and longed to be with her, to comfort and help her in the battle she was fighting alone; to give her motherly counsel, motherly caresses. But as club president her place was there, whether her heart went with her or not.

At Walter's earnest request, she had agreed not to mention his arrival to any one outside the immediate family.

"I don't feel like seeing a mob of people," he said morosely. "Coming back alone, as I have, after the way we planned, seems to make my loss harder than ever to bear. You don't have to tell them, do you? I may only stay a day or two — I don't know, yet; my plans are uncertain. If any

one asks, say that a friend named Husted is visiting you. That's true enough: I'm William Husted legally, you know. Walter Warren doesn't exist now."

"All right," she acquiesced with apparent cheerfulness, although she was eager to shout aloud the glad tidings of the wanderer's return even though it involved the sorry tale of the false Mrs. Husted. Of course people would say that she had been taken in, but it was the truth. She had longed for the afternoon's gathering when she could astonish her friends by her account of Walter's marvelous rescue. In fancy she had already approached Mrs. Thorne with the startling announcement: "Walter's alive and well. The dear boy is with us now. He couldn't bear to stay away any longer. And he insists on dividing his fortune with me, too." After all, Mrs. Porter was "not too good for human nature's daily food." Somewhere in her kindly composition a pinch of leaven worked; a small pinch perhaps — far less than the average allowance per capita — but its effect was apparent.

A promise was a promise, however, and though she spent a long afternoon with the Executive Board of the W. P. C. not one word of the morning's dramatic happenings passed her lips. Several times during the earlier part of the session she broke forth into an ecstatic "Oh! —" but the ecstasy always ended in some prosaic suggestion or comment. After the third such outburst her remarks became conspicuously infrequent; the strain was telling upon her.

She returned home quite late, filled with compunction in regard to Mystery. She hastened to her room at once, but found her still barricaded behind a locked door. Even her loving request: "May I come in, dear? It's mother," failed to gain her admission.

"Not now, please," Mystery pleaded.

"But you must have some tea," she persisted.

"Katy gave me some, thank you. Please let me stay quiet a little while longer, may I?"

"Why certainly, dear, but if you are sick we must let Doctor Guthrie know," she urged, feeling chilled in spite of herself at her reception.

"He can't help me. Nobody can."

The hopeless apathy in the girl's voice went straight to the listener's heart. She longed to take the sufferer in her arms and smoothe away her troubles with loving mother-touch, but one of the ruling principles of her busy life had been to try to give people what they want when they want it. If Mystery craved solitude, she should have it. Undoubtedly the good doctor was right; the girl's desire to be alone, to think, confirmed it. Some enlightening ray must have pierced the clouds hovering over her early life; not a welcome ray, evidently, or possibly one so inadequate it but intensified the darkness, and her very soul was wrestling in an effort to strengthen it; to force it to dissipate forever the mists of uncertainty that hung over her. With a sympathetic sigh the good lady turned away from the closed door.

"She'll come to me when she needs me, poor

girlie," she tried to console herself. "I'll wait patiently."

Aunt Mig had also gone up to Mystery's room the instant she reached home. In her undemonstrative way she was as fond of her as Mrs. Porter herself, and the picture of the poor girl fighting her battle alone came between her and her text-book more than once during the afternoon, causing her to assure the best scholar in the class with solemn earnestness: "I wish I could help you, poor child!" The lad's stare of astonishment brought her back from the closed door behind which the struggle was going on, to the gaping class. She flushed in embarrassment as she begged his pardon for her absent-mindedness. But the closed door had confronted her, too. With a consideration wholly unselfish she forebore to press her attentions upon the sufferer.

Chester, boyishly indifferent in many respects, was keenly distressed over Mystery's illness. Even in that short time she had become more than a sister to the sisterless lad. There was an admixture of chumship, and the usual sisterly "bossiness," as he called it, was happily absent. Whenever the family voice was raised in criticism, Chester was always sure of one advocate. It was a sincere advocacy, too; Mystery's affection for the boy enabled her to see the genuine manliness that lay beneath the slangy, sulky, irritatingly indifferent front he often showed to the world at large. She realized that the constant criticism that fell to his share made him keenly alive to the foibles and inconsistencies of his critics. And he appreciated her appreciation; her estimate of him

was unconsciously influencing his character; he wanted to live up to it.

Before he came that afternoon, he visited the fruit store and recklessly expended a whole quarter of his month's slender income on a bunch of white grapes which he smuggled in to Katy, with strict injunctions to present them immediately after supper.

"Ain't they whoppers, though?" he demanded, holding the graceful cluster at arm's length for her admiration. "Don't knock any of 'em off when you carry 'em up, will you? It'd spoil the nice pointed shape. Guess I'd better wash 'em off first: might be germy. There! put 'em on that plate that looks like a green leaf — you know — and lay a napkin over 'em, so it'll be a surprise. Be sure to say I'm sorry she's sick. And look here, Katrina," he added impressively, winking knowingly as he spoke, "don't you tell everything you know, understand? Win thinks he's the whole show around this house. Be careful now, won't you?"

Katy promised; she and the "Kid" had been allies in more than one nefarious scheme. The grapes were presented and accepted through the closed door, and none of the family were the wiser. Unknown to the donor, they brought a ray of comfort to the soul-sick sufferer.

Winthrop came home from town that evening burdened with a long package wrapped in white paraffin paper, which he carried with scrupulous care. He, too, made Katy his emissary, entering via the kitchen door and displaying before her delighted eyes three great golden chrysanthemums, veritable aristocrats of

the flower family. Once more history repeated itself.

"They're for her; beauties, aren't they?" he demanded, holding them up for her inspection. "Be sure you don't break the stems when you take them up. Wait! I'll get that tall green vase that mother uses for them; that's just the thing, and the green sets them off. Tell her I hope she's feeling better. And look here, Katy, you needn't say anything about this to any one, understand? That kid brother of mine's getting too blamed meddlesome, anyhow."

When Katy presented herself at Miss Mystery's door with offering number two, she was bidden to enter. She advanced joyously to the bed on which the girl was lying, dressed in her pale blue bath-robe, but her joy became shocked distress as she caught sight of the white face on the pillow. A night and a day of struggle, of soul-wrenching agony, had left their imprint upon the young face. Those few hours seemed to have robbed her of all that she had gained. The pretty color that usually flushed her fair skin had given place to a haggard ghastliness; heavy black circles showed beneath the blue eyes, making them seem larger, more appealing than ever before. But what touched the good-hearted Irish girl most was the look of hopeless misery so plainly written on the pallid face, in the whole despairing attitude. She tried to find words of cheer, but without success. By an effort she managed to deliver Winthrop's message, then she left the room hurriedly, to hide her emotion.

"Sure an' she's better off without no mem'ry, I'm

thinkin', if that's the way it's goin' to treat her!" she sobbed into the roller towel. "I'll bet they's lots of people'd be glad enough not to remember things; lots of 'em you wouldn't think it of, neither — church members an' swells, too, belike. An' what'd she want mem'ry for, anyway? She don't need more'n she's got — a good home, an' everybody lovin' her, an' beaux an' all — an' now look at her! She looks like a corpse that don't even care!"

Walter did not appear until the family were gathered in the sitting-room just before the supper hour. He had spent the afternoon in New York, visiting familiar scenes, and covering miles of territory in an effort to tire himself into sleepiness. For of late the demon of insomnia had held him in its grasp; night after night he was condemned to long hours of torturing thought, until he fairly dreaded bedtime. Pictures of the past rose before him in the darkness with startling distinctness; the wedding, the short sweet hours of the honeymoon, just they two alone. The captain and his crew? They did not exist — for them. Then other pictures, the sudden disaster, and the terrible time that followed, seared his memory. But harder to bear even than these were the visions of his young wife in their home, of children gathered about their fireside, visions always ushered in by the unvoiced decree: "And these thou shalt never see!" No wonder he tried to tramp himself into oblivion!

Mrs. Porter had given the family a hurried account of the morning's occurrences, so Walter's entrance was followed by a medley of congratula-

tion and condolence, rejoicing and regret. To the astonishment of them all Aunt Mig remarked quietly: "I felt sure she was an impostor!"

"Now, Mig, you didn't! You disliked her, and that made you —"

"Made me investigate for myself," she finished promptly. "I agreed with Chester — we were 'easy marks'; so I went over to the Waldorf the other evening —"

"What!"

"Yes! I did! I said I had some calls to make and I had — in the city. I felt that I must satisfy myself. I know the lawyer was convinced that her claim was just or he wouldn't have given in, but it doesn't take much to convince a man where a woman like that is concerned. They talk about brains, and domestic virtues, and all that sort of thing, but you put the brainiest woman in the universe beside a beauty with great dark eyes and a voice like hers, and see which one the men will choose! Humph! And she was handsome, I'll acknowledge."

"But what good did your visit to the Waldorf do?"

"It convinced me," she said quietly. "I think it put her on her guard, too. I believe that was why she decided to leave in such a hurry; she was afraid!"

"Go on, Mig," Mrs. Porter implored. "Tell us about it. You don't mind, do you, Walter?"

Walter shook his head, and Miss Mig obeyed.

"I asked to see Mrs. William Husted, and was just about to send up my card when I saw her, or

some one enough like her to be a twin sister, coming down Peacock Alley looking like the Queen of Sheba, an attentive cavalier on each side of her. She was evidently going to the opera, because she had a magnificent evening coat of white satin and fur over her shoulders, and I caught a glimpse of bare neck where her wrap was not fastened in front. Her dress was gold-spangled white net with a long pointed train, and her hair sparkled with a tiara of diamonds that must have cost a fortune. I stepped towards her, my eyes fixed upon her in a fascinated stare. She must have felt it, because she broke off in the middle of a sentence, and glancing up, looked me straight in the eyes. Then she stopped short and I heard her say: 'Oh, dear! I forgot to urge Mrs. Husted not to sit up for me. If you will excuse me a moment I'll telephone up to her room. Poor thing! She's all tired out!" She swept towards the desk and I followed, and heard the message. Her voice was not a bit like the widow's: it was ugly and husky. She begged 'dear Winnie' to go straight to bed and not to get up early in the morning unless she felt rested.

"As soon as she had gone I asked the clerk, confidentially, who she was. 'Mrs. Warrener, from Australia,' he told me, adding facetiously: 'If there are many more like that out there I think I'll emigrate. She throws New York beauties into the shade.' Then he held out his hand for my card and sent it up. After a short delay Mrs. Husted came down, dressed as she always is when she comes over here. She apologized for keeping me waiting, and

explained that her companion was going to the opera that night, and she had been helping her dress.

"'Perhaps you saw her, did you?' she questioned. 'She started only a short time ago. You'd know her, I feel sure, because she resembles me, some people think; but she's far handsomer, of course. She was looking her best to-night: I was proud of her. Poor dear! I encourage her to go about. She has friends here, you know, and she was so self-sacrificing in consenting to take this long, long trip for my sake. A sorrowing woman is not a cheerful companion, and Blanche dearly loves society, and dress and excitement.'

"I was convinced then and there," Aunt Mig finished solemnly.

"But why didn't you warn us?" Winthrop questioned, while his mother gazed at Miss Mig with reproach in her eyes.

"Warn you? Of what? I was convinced; I was absolutely convinced. When I left the Waldorf I'd have taken my oath that 'Blanche' in all her shimmering glory, was at the opera, just as she said!"

They all laughed heartily, she made her confession so palpably against her will.

"If she could convince you, against the evidence of your own eyes, what chance did poor Mr. Tuttle have?" Winthrop demanded, with a wink at the rest. "You ought to sympathize with him, instead of railing against him."

"I do. We're fellow-victims. I wonder if he feels as foolish as I do!"

"So that's why you kept mum about it!" Chester chuckled. "Wouldn't you have crowed, though, if she hadn't pulled the wool over your eyes! Whew!"

Katy had to come to the door of the sitting-room twice before she could make herself heard amid the hubbub of questions and answers.

"There's hot biscuit, the kind Mr. Walter useter eat such a pile of," she complained in aggrieved tones; "an' broiled steak don't git no better fer the standin', neither!"

"What's that I hear?" Walter demanded. He had been to the kitchen for a chat, earlier in the day, much to Katy's delight. "Hot biscuit just like Katy used to make! Lead me to them, Ches! Right about face! Double quick!"

He offered his arm to Mrs. Porter, trying to talk in his old hearty way. He even made a tentative effort to joke, but it was not a success. His long tramp had given him an appetite, however, so he did ample justice to Katy's efforts, and she fairly beamed upon him as she replenished the biscuit plate and brought in a second supply of the steaming scalloped potatoes and the apple pudding that was one of her pet desserts.

Chester, too, was hungry. He had put in an afternoon of hard work — the contents of the old purse in Mystery's charge did not yet equal the amount of the debts contracted so merrily — but curiosity conquered hunger. He "wanted to know," and right away, too.

"I don't see how you were rescued," he began, but ended with a resentful "Ouch! I understand!

You don't have to kick my shins black and blue!" in answer to Winthrop's over-vigorous warning.

"I'll tell you about it after supper, Kid," Walter promised. "It's a long story and not a lively one." With the words his assumed gayety fell from him like a garment; he sat among them in absorbed retrospection, his mind busy with gloomier pictures than the one of contented family life before him. In spite of the united efforts of the others, conversation languished, and the meal was finished almost in silence. A hurried meal it was, too. They were all eager to hear Walter's story, and there would not be much spare time between supper and the W. P. C. entertainment.

They went into the sitting-room the instant the meal was over. Aunt Mig started to light the gas, but Walter made an involuntary movement to shade his eyes, and she promptly turned it off again, leaving the room in the cheery glow of the hard coal fire in the wide, old-fashioned grate.

As soon as they were settled, Walter began his story without preamble of any sort. If the telling were an ordeal for him, he endured it stoically, feeling that these good friends deserved to know all.

"I had bad luck for months after I left home. In fact I got down to the actual bread-line."

"Oh, no!" The exclamation was wrung from Mrs. Porter.

"But I did, and right here in New York, too — at the Bowery Mission. There's a work for you! Talk about your libraries! Give me soul-rescue every time, for that's what missions like that do.

They feed starved bodies — yes; but they save starved souls from hell. I don't intend to forget what they did for me. I thought of you all more than once, but I was determined not to come back here until I'd done something to show that I was a man, not a driveling weakling. I had been as far west as Chicago, and failed there; then I worked my way back to New York. Through the kindness of a man I met at the Mission I got the chance to work my way to England. It was on a cattle-ship, and I earned my passage ten times over. While there I was fortunate enough to hear of a place as attendant on a man just recovering from a serious illness. I told him my story frankly. I think he took me out of pity. He was not sick enough to need a regular nurse, you understand, but he was still far from strong. He was subject to attacks of heart failure, and wanted a companion on his voyage home. He was an Englishman named Husted — William Husted — but he had lived in Australia for years, and was enthusiastic over the opportunities the country offered, especially in stock-raising and mining.

"Before the long journey was over we had become friends. He spoke to me freely of himself and the precarious state of his health. His days were numbered and he knew it. I was able to render him many services on the voyage, but I think he cared most for my companionship and the long talks we had together. When we landed I accompanied him to the hotel where he was to rest before starting for his home, thinking that my work was over, but he insisted on my remaining with him. At midnight

that night I was called to his bedside — he was dying!"

Walter covered his eyes with his hand for a moment, while dead silence reigned in the room. The rest respected his sorrow. A moment later he resumed his story.

"In short, choking gasps he told me that he would never rally from the attack; that the end of all things had come for him. His face bore witness to the truth of his assertion. Such suffering was stamped upon it I longed to rush from the room, or to close my eyes; anything to shut out the pitiful sight. He had told me much of his life during our long talks on shipboard. I knew that he had lost wife and child; that he was absolutely alone in the world, with not even a distant relative to whom to turn. He then confided to me that he had anticipated just such a seizure — heart trouble like his is relentless — and had made his will immediately after reaching the hotel. In it he left everything to his 'foster-son'— house and grazing lands, stocks and securities of various kinds — for his 'unselfish care and devotion to a suffering man.' What that clause meant to me you may imagine. In agony though he was, he tried to tell me about a claim to a gold mine that had been left to him by a stranger whom he had befriended two years before. The mine was still an unknown quantity. Even its location had not been discovered, as the owner of the claim died before he had time to give full directions for reaching it. This much was known from the hurried sketch and the meager description of the

dying man: that the way to it led through the most dangerous part of a danger-ridden land. In spite of this, Mr. Husted had supreme faith in its ultimate discovery; faith that had been communicated to him by the original owner, and that he, in turn, even in the scant time allowed to him, managed to communicate to me. His failing health and his physician's prohibition had kept him from going in search of his treasure-trove up to this time, but he confessed, frankly, that eagerness to begin the difficult quest had brought him back to Australia before he reaped the benefits of his enforced sojourn abroad.

"'But it's no use kicking against the pricks, my lad,' he muttered in tones rendered husky by his unbearable agony. 'It's all over for me: my race ends before I reach the goal, but I'm going to make it a relay. I want you to sprint on in my place, boy. You have health and youth and energy — an invincible trio. Go in and win, with my bless —'

"Those were his last words." Walter's voice broke. He passed his hand hurriedly across his eyes, then gathering himself together went on in low tones:

"Short as our acquaintance had been, I felt as though I had lost a father. In fact most people thought me his son, as I was, by adoption. I was the only mourner, but I did all that lay in my power to show respect to my dead friend, for he was that; friendship isn't measured by time. I had him buried beneath a eucalyptus tree on his own place. He had asked to have it so. Then I set to work to carry out his wishes. Each week I intended to write

to you, but each week I delayed, hoping to find the mine. But I had not forgotten you; surely you believe that. I had all the property willed to you," he turned to Mrs. Porter, "before I left the city; before I even saw my possessions. My friend's sudden death made me realize the risk of delay. I had the will drawn up in my own name: it was Walter Warren whom you had befriended, not William Husted as I was known in Australia according to Mr. Husted's request.

"I at once organized an expedition to search for the mine. It took thousands, and it was a flat failure. A second expedition, at even greater expense, was a greater failure besides costing me the lives of two of the party. Men scoffed at me for a credulous idiot. I was discouraged — almost down and out, in fact — but each time I decided to abandon the search and become a grazier on the fine run that had come to me, my benefactor's eyes, filled with reproach and pleading, seemed to haunt me. I could see them in the dark; I could see them in the sunshine; and wherever I saw them their urge was unmistakable, so each time I went back to my wild-goose chase with renewed determination to keep on until I succeeded or died in my tracks. It was a weird insistence that pushed me on; a dead man's surety through another dead man's belief, bolstering up my wavering faith.

"By this time I was a mere wreck of my former self, physically, and financially, too, for my last available dollar was gone, my land mortgaged to the utmost. To fit out the third expedition I was

obliged to sell a half interest in my claim. Faith in the mine-myth had found a new victim, you see; it was strong enough to survive two dead men and one human wreck. But however great the cost, I felt myself spurred on to one last effort before acknowledging defeat.

"I would not describe to you the horrors of that third attempt if I could. Pushing on day after day into the trackless wastes ahead of us, our only guide a few strokes on a scrap of paper, penned by a madman, possibly, for my friend knew nothing of the man who held the secret of the mine. He had his account of its marvelous richness, it is true, and the hasty sketch of its location, both given him only when the man's soul was actually leaving his body. It seemed, Mr. Husted said, as though he could not bear to give up his secret even at that last moment. And always before us, as we journeyed, lay the greatest of all perils in that desolate land, the menace of empty water-bags, and at the end of our day's journey a dried-up water hole! That would mean death for us all, a horrible, lingering delirium of fever under a parching sun. But after all we humans have our magnets to which we are attracted as irresistibly as steel to its magnet, and the strongest of these is gold, precious yellow gold. It draws us on and on, permitting no deflections, no side paths, no dalliance.

"But the third attempt also proved a failure, and my partner and I had decided to abandon the quest as hopeless, when one of the natives sent out as a scout returned with a report that gave us

strength for one more spurt. At the end of the next day we found the place as described, an actual fact, not a mere will-o'-the-wisp dancing on before us, leading us to death and destruction.

"And such a mine it proved to be! Such untold richness! Could I have kept the whole claim I'd be a millionaire many times over, but I had been forced, as I said, to sacrifice a half interest, and later we were obliged to form a company. In fact the men of our party had endured the hardships only under promise of an interest in the mine if the expedition proved successful. The lure of gold led them on just as it led us; no hirelings would have held out against such odds. But even so I was rich, richer than I had ever dreamed of being.

"I had met Winnie — I called her Winsome; it suited her perfectly — at the hotel not long after my arrival. She and her mother were kind to me during the sorrowful time that followed Mr. Husted's death. Their sympathy helped me, when I was so alone. They were Americans, too — Virginians — and one turns naturally to compatriots in a foreign country. The mother was a restless semi-invalid. They had journeyed to Australia seeking health for her, or at least the diversion of new scenes. They, too, were strangers in a strange land, but even in America they had no close ties. I knew, from the very first, that Winsome was the only woman in the world for me, and once more I delayed writing in order to bring my wife to you.

"At length the mine was running smoothly, with my partner, who was mine-mad, in charge. He is a

crusty old bachelor, but the 'Last Call,' as he named it, is wife, child, home — everything, to him. It happened that Winsome's mother was enjoying one of her spells of comparative health at that time, so I persuaded her to take advantage of such a propitious combination and get married at once. Her mother added her plea to mine; she had no illusions in regard to her temporary improvement in health, and longed to see her daughter safe. We were to sail for England at noon on the day we were married, but Winsome's mother had a relapse immediately after we left for the steamer, and my wife was recalled. Her mother recovered but it was too late to make our boat. I think that woman told you all this. She learned it from her sister who was devoted to her patient.

"We finally started on our honeymoon in one of my partner's great steam freighters, instead of the liner on which we had engaged passage, but we cared nothing for that. Why should we? We were ideally happy. We had youth, health, wealth, and best of all, each other; and we were on our way to the dearest friends a friendless lad ever had. I was in a fever of impatience to tell you of my good fortune but even more to show — her — to you. We had left the harbor and were steaming along the charted course, when suddenly a furious driving gale changed our sedate progress to a mad rush. The ship was like a plaything in its grasp. Before the captain could get her under control she was hurled upon one of the treacherous coral reefs that make the navigation of Australian waters so dangerous. She

struck with such force that she sank almost immediately.

"You know how I tried to save my darling." He turned to Mrs. Porter. "I did my best, God knows, but I saw her go down before my very eyes. Think of it: the liner had a safe voyage, while her life — my little love's — was sacrificed to a delay of a few short hours!

"I don't know what a civilized doctor would have called the illness that I had for weeks after my rescue — brain-fever, perhaps, complicated by three days' exposure — but the simple people of the island called it the sea's evil spell and tried to exorcise it in ways thrilling enough to read of, but deucedly unpleasant to endure. They did it all in good faith, however, for my ultimate recovery. To them I was a messenger from their gods, temporarily disabled, it is true, but still potent and important; so that, save for their weird, nauseating medical methods, I was well treated, especially after the delirium left me and I was 'free from the evil spell of the sea,' as they thought. But imagine my feelings when I regained consciousness and learned, by gestured questioning, that of the *Dunkirk* not a vestige was left. She had disappeared forever, and I was the sole survivor.

"The little island that had proven a friendly haven also proved an inexorable jailor. It was leagues distant from its neighbors and far out of the course of vessels outward or homeward bound, and the native boats were mere dug-outs of the crudest description. The people lived in the most primitive fashion, subsisting on roots and fruits. I, perforce,

did likewise, and not unwillingly, at first. What had I to live for? What good would my new-found wealth do me, now that she was gone?

"But some time later, when a vessel was driven out of her course by a storm and came close to the island, I learned that a man does not lightly cast off home and friends and civilized life; that the world, even though a hard task-master, still has its urge, bred in the bone, as it were. At any rate I found myself signaling madly, and it was with a feeling akin to eagerness that I finally boarded her and began the first stage of my long journey home."

Mrs. Porter sighed softly. She had made a motion to draw closer to his side at the mention of his wife, but had restrained herself, leaving him alone in his dusky corner. Aunt Mig made several furtive dabs at her tear-wet eyes, then ostentatiously removed and cleaned her glasses to disguise her emotion. Winthrop stared into the fire, and for once Chester remained speechless. After a moment's silence, Walter tried to break the tension by adding with an attempt at a laugh: "I'm a regular talking machine to-night. I'm afraid I've made you all late for the show. Mother'll never forgive me if I interfere with that, will you?"

"You dear boy," she was beginning, when the sound of soft footsteps in the hall made her look up. In the doorway stood Mystery, her pale blue bath-robe thrown over her clinging night-dress, a glimpse of soft white neck and rounded bosom showing between the sheer lace bands that edged it. Her short golden curls were disarranged just as she had risen

from her pillow. Coming from the brightly lighted hall into the comparative darkness of the sitting-room, she failed to see the stranger in the corner, and he remained transfixed after his first involuntary start of astonishment, staring at her with distended eyes of one who sees an apparition. The others looked at her in sympathetic silence; the havoc the last few hours had wrought showed with pitiless plainness.

For an instant she stood in the doorway, her great blue eyes fixed in mournful gaze upon Mrs. Porter's face, but when the kindly arms were outstretched in affectionate invitation she advanced towards her unhesitatingly.

"I didn't mean to shut you out after all your goodness to me." The words came with a remorseful rush. "But I couldn't help it. I had to fight it out alone. I know, now. I know! I know! But oh! I wish I'd never remembered! I wish I'd never been born!"

With an uncontrollable burst of grief, she threw herself into the outstretched arms, seeming to forget the others, if indeed she saw them at all. The sound of her pitiful sobs roused Walter from his trance. He tried to speak but his dry lips at first refused to do his bidding. Moistening them nervously he managed to whisper: "Winsome!"

His voice was low and so husky with emotion it was scarcely recognizable, but she raised her head, her face lighting up wondrously for an instant. Then a hopeless look settled upon her joy like a pall. She once more laid her head on Mrs. Porter's

motherly bosom, murmuring drearily: "I thought — but he's dead! he's dead! Oh! I can't forget now if I try."

The wail of anguish effectually aroused the man's numbed faculties. He started towards her impulsively, pleading: "Winsome! Winsome! My wife!" She turned a startled face towards him. Suddenly a light seemed to break over it; with an inarticulate cry she threw herself into his arms and clung to his neck in a passion of joyous conviction.

"Thank God! it is Winsome!" he exclaimed reverently. . . .

CHAPTER XVII

THE EXTRA NUMBER ON THE PROGRAMME

"What! out of senseless Nothing to provoke
A conscious Something . . .
What! from his helpless creature be repaid
Pure Gold . . .

During the long night and day of misery, that followed the finding of the pin, the one link with her past, Mystery's newly-awakened memories had been by slow, painstaking degrees, pieced into one perfect, soul-agonizing whole. She recalled her wandering life with her invalid mother; the meeting with her lover; her distress during his absence in search of the mine. Then came her marriage, and the return to the sick-room; followed, even more vividly, by the memory of the short, sweet opening hours of her honeymoon. She shivered with dread as she saw again the storm and the wreck, and experienced once more the awful sensation that overwhelmed her as her husband launched her improvised raft upon the heaving black waters. Only the knowledge that he himself would be with her had kept her from shrieking aloud in terror as the waves towered over her, threatening to crush her under their tons of weight. Then came a mad whirl as they spun her about in their angry clutch. She remembered crying out to her beloved, but her voice

was lost in the roar of the storm. After that came merciful oblivion.

When she regained consciousness, she gazed into a pair of kindly eyes bent in pitying scrutiny upon her. She learned later, that she had been picked up, half-drowned, wholly unconscious, early in the day; that she was on board a palatial yacht; that it was the yacht's mistress, the silvery-haired lady whose voice was as gentle as her face, and who, out of the kindness of her heart, was caring personally for the waif whom the crew had rescued from the ocean's vengeful grasp. Of the illness which followed she could recall nothing; her next conscious experience was being tenderly carried from the yacht to a motor, and from that to a hotel in some one's strong arms — the doctor's, she thought. That she had drawn off her rings in her delirium and sent them flying through the opened port-hole with the injunction: "Find him for me! He'll know you both!" she had no recollection, until the silvery-haired lady told her about it. Later came the second voyage, this time on an ocean liner, in charge of a plump, comfortable nurse provided by the silvery-haired lady. All this Mystery told them in halting explanation, turning at intervals to lay her hand upon Walter's breast, or to touch his face, as though to assure herself that he was real, was there in flesh and blood.

Marjory had come over on an errand for her sister-in-law, but the errand was completely forgotten. She sat beside Winthrop on the couch, drinking in Mystery's story with breathless interest.

"But how did you get here finally?" Mrs. Porter questioned, realizing that now, with its God-given sequel before their eyes, the telling of the story could do her no harm.

"I remember waiting at the hotel until Mrs. Fairchild, the nurse, went to the stores to get me the clothes I needed. Up to that time I had worn kimonas and robes which the maid on the yacht altered to fit me. Mrs. Fairchild would have come over with me herself, but an urgent cablegram reached her the morning we landed, and she was obliged to return at once. She engaged passage on a steamer sailing that very afternoon. I was well by that time, even though I did look like the 'little bag of bones' one of the stewards called me, not unkindly, you know — his voice was full of pity. And I knew just where I wanted to go. All the way over the words: 'Mother Porter — St. George! Mother Porter — St. George!' kept ringing in my ears. I could never forget that; it was to be the goal of our wedding-trip, wasn't it, Will?"

"'Will?'" Chester repeated involuntarily.

"I'm William Husted now," Walter explained. "I took my friend's name at once: it was one of the few things I could do for him. This little lady doesn't know Walter Warren, do you, dear?"

Mystery smiled. "If I had known you by that name perhaps, when I heard them all talking about you — but no! no! I'm glad I didn't!" She shuddered as she spoke. "It would have meant weeks of suffering instead of hours. Oh! if you could know what these last few hours have been to me. I

prayed to God to take my memory away again. I did; I couldn't help it! I thought if He did I could be happy here with you all even without — my husband."

She said the last words shyly, the delicate color coming and going in her cheeks, her eyes shining with happiness. Walter stooped over and kissed her.

"I'd never had a real home, you know," she went on wistfully. "We traveled, traveled, traveled, and I was so tired of hotels, and pensions, apartments and lodgings; but mother seemed to crave change, excitement, anything to take her mind off her malady. Perhaps my longing for a home is partly the reason why Will's description of this dear, old place and the family, made such a deep impression on me. Of course you were all strangers to me, but I felt as though I knew you and knew the place, too. Now it has all come back to me. Why, I want to run my fingers down between the back and the seat of the couch, right this minute, just as Will said he and Winthrop used to do —"

"By Jingo! that reminds me!" Chester exclaimed excitedly. Before any one realized his intention, he had reached the couch on which Marjory and Winthrop were seated at a discreet distance from one another. Over the expanse that stretched between them a newspaper was arranged with careful carelessness, under the fond delusion that it screened any lover-like indiscretions from the eyes of the family. It did, simply because they were all too deeply interested in the reunited lovers to pay attention to anything else. But suddenly, without a

word of warning, the paper guard was ruthlessly jerked aside.

"Gee! Holding hands! Did you ever!" the boy jeered, standing before them, a creature of "nods and becks and wreathed smiles." Winthrop longed to throttle him, an operation in which Marjory would have assisted cheerfully. "Don't move!" the boy urged. "I just remembered the money that widow, oh! you know! — gave me the second time she came over. I was so mad because she was walking off with our million,— I mean your million, Walt — that I pitched it down on the couch. I only hope she saw me do it. But now that she's gone I might as well spend it, I suppose, as to leave it there. Money ought to be put into circulation, oughtn't it, Aunt Mig?"

Even as he aired his aunt's sentiments, he was vigorously raking the space back of the seat, jabbing Winthrop and Marjory impartially with his elbows during the process. Walter watched him with twinkling eyes. When the lad turned away, crestfallen, he held something up before him.

"Not hunting for this, were you, Kid?" he inquired casually.

"Yep! Thanks! Hand it over!"

"No, sir! Finders keepers, losers weepers! You neglected to take advantage of the flood tide that leads on to fortune! Why, I hadn't been in this room ten minutes, youngster, before I fished out this, and this," displaying the tarnished dime. "Now, young man, if you'll hold over your treasure hunt, we'll let the little lady go on."

"But I just happened to remember it," the lad apologized in confusion.

"Well, forget it now, or I won't 'happen to remember' that motorcycle I want your help in choosing. Go on, darling!" There was ineffable tenderness in his voice as he turned to his wife. "Tell me, when did you get hurt, and how did it happen?" For he knew now of her strange malady. In answer to his passionate accusation: "Oh! how could you torture me! Why didn't you tell me that she was here?" Mrs. Porter had told him the whole strange story.

Mystery smiled into his eyes as she obeyed.

"I didn't have any trouble at all in getting over here. At the corner I asked a small boy which was the Porter place. He pointed it out, then scampered off, and I was just turning to come here when some bricks fell to the pavement in front of me. They startled me, and before I could move away several more came banging down. I felt a sharp blow on my head and stumbled, but managed to keep from falling. Then I tried to hurry on to the house, but it seemed as though I had leaden weights on my feet and balloons tied to my head.

"I remember hearing a buzz of voices when I finally reached the front door. I shrank back, because I didn't care to meet a crowd of people feeling as I did then; it seemed as though my head would sail up into the air any minute. But at last I summoned up courage, and slipping in I went up to the second story, dragging myself along by holding on to the banisters. At the top of the stairs I heard

the voices again, more clearly than before, and I went on — like a wounded animal, it seems to me now — my one instinct to be alone with my terrible pain. I wanted to put my head down on a pillow — anything to keep it from being so heavy; for by this time the balloons had sailed away and the leaden weights were on my head as well as my feet. I crept up the second flight of stairs on my hands and knees. I couldn't hold my head up. Then I tried to call Mother Porter, but all I could say was 'Oh! Oh! Oh!' That's all I remember."

"That must have been the queer moaning sound we heard, you poor little thing!" Marjory exclaimed in pitying accents.

"She's almost as big as you are," Walter reminded her with mock seriousness. "And she's married, too."

"So's Marjory and some one else I could mention — almost," Chester volunteered cheerfully, with a prodigious wink and a series of significant gestures meant to enlighten Walter's ignorance. "Not yet — but soon, eh, Marjory?"

"Amen!" Winthrop added, taking possession of her hand in spite of her embarrassment, this time without even the pretense of the paper shield. "My brand!" he informed his friend proudly, indicating the solitaire that blazed upon Marjory's engagement finger.

Walter's congratulations were hearty enough to suit the most exacting taste. The world and everything in it was perfect, or so it seemed to him, just then. His heart was a pæan of praise to its

Creator. His horizon was wonderfully clear, until Chester summoned a fleeting cloud.

"If this hasn't been a new deal, all right!" the boy exclaimed, in the jubilant tones of one giving pleasing information. "The doctor and Arthur both get left in this shuffle! Too bad there aren't three Miss Mysterys, so there'd be enough to go around!"

"What's that?" Walter looked decidedly interested, not to say alarmed. "Who are the doctor and Arthur?" His question was as sharp as a report. Mystery, to whom it was addressed, was looking reproachfully at Chester and vouchsafed no reply.

"Just two men who were willing to take her off our hands, Walter," Winthrop explained; then seeing the disturbed look on his friend's face he added: "But she refused to go, didn't you, Miss Mystery?"

"Mrs. Mystery!" Chester corrected. "Say, look here! Is she a bride of a few hours or is she an old married woman?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Walter replied good-naturedly. "She suits me perfectly in either rôle!"

"Suppose she'd been married to Arthur, or the doctor when you came back," the boy went on. "Gee! Wouldn't that have been a mix-up! Would you have done like Enoch what's his name? Or would you have taken her away from him?"

The rest laughed, even Mystery herself, though she blushed all over her fair face.

"For Heaven's sake, Chester!" Walter spoke almost irritably; the picture was evidently not to his

liking. "What does it matter as long as she wasn't married to anybody but me."

"It doesn't matter; I didn't say it did! I just wanted to know, that's all. Anyhow, you'll have to get her another sparkler. Funny how engaged people seem to like to throw their rings —"

"That will do for you, Kid!" Winthrop was the irritated one now, and it was Marjory's turn to blush. "I honestly believe that tongue of yours is hung in the middle and wags at both ends."

"Well it isn't," Chester retorted hotly. "And I'll bet I won't make such a fool of myself when I'm engaged to Mar —" Then he, too, blushed, even through his freckles.

The "Men's Night" at the W. P. C. proved a tremendous success even though the president of the club, who was punctuality personified, as a rule, was half an hour late and presided in such an excited, fluttering manner that more than one member, accustomed to her usual calm, cool decision, gazed at her apprehensively, wondering whether she were ill or something had gone wrong.

At Walter's earnest request, Mrs. Porter had outlined the club's aims for his benefit as only a tender-hearted woman, interested heart and soul in the success of each undertaking, could do. In the few minutes at her disposal, while she waited for the carriage he had insisted upon ordering, she told him of the work crying to be done and the hampering conditions under which they were working. He listened to her account in thoughtful silence, then helped her

into the carriage and went back to the house, so that she was surprised, when she glanced up, later in the evening to see him and Mystery both present. They were seated at the rear of the hall, and seemed as deeply interested as the rest of the audience. She had not expected them to sacrifice their first evening together, even on the altar of her beloved club.

The last performer on the programme finished his piano solo, a mock-rhapsody whose clashes and bangs he had explained in hushed tones as a meeting of camels and caravans in the desert, and the reunion of two long-separated brother camels. As he closed his laughable nonsense with one grand jangle of octaves and rose, hand on heart, bowing low to the audience, a slip of paper was handed to the platform. Mrs. Porter read it in some surprise but announced quietly: "A gentleman who is interested in the club and its work wishes to tell us something of his travels in far countries. Allow me to introduce Mr. William Husted."

Walter stepped to the platform and bowed gravely. In his hand he carried a glass ball of diamond purity. Before he began to speak, he held it aloft where the light struck full upon it.

"You have all heard of the wonderful fortune-telling crystals of the Orientals," he began quietly. "This is one of them. It was not given to me directly, I regret to say, but was the dying bequest of the friend to whom it was presented as a reward for services he was fortunate enough to render the original owner, a man who was the last of a long

and honorable race. Therefore he was defrauding no one when he gave this treasure into my care."

The audience stared at the speaker intently. After the nonsense-rhapsody that preceded him they were in some doubt as to how to receive his story. Of course they had heard of fortune-telling crystals, but they put no faith in them. Cultured people never did; such faith smacked of heathenish ignorance. Yet this dark, self-contained man, this stranger in their midst, seemed to be speaking in all seriousness, so they awaited developments with what patience they possessed.

"Tradition says that this particular crystal was once the guide of a great Oriental monarch, one who held the destinies of millions of souls at his mercy. Owing to his clemency — his rule was one of love, not fear — it is endued with peculiar power beyond that of most crystals. In it the owner, if he has kept the law, divine and human, may recall the past, behold the present and learn the future; but — mark my words well, good people — these pictures are visible even to me, only when some good deed, some unselfish act has been performed. To-night something tells me that the necessary condition has been fulfilled; that my crystal will show me the three pictures. I cannot let you see them for yourselves — the charm would be broken should other eyes than mine behold them — but I will describe them to you as they appear to me. Are you ready, friends?"

They were more than ready. They leaned forward breathlessly intent upon his words. Not one of them all, though many had known him well as a

boy, recognized in "Mr. William Husted," this sallow, hollow-cheeked, bright-eyed traveler, who looked forty at least, the youthful protégé of the Porters, Winthrop's High School chum, Walter Warren. But why should they? Was not Walter Warren lying dead at the bottom of the sea? Had not his widow come from Australia to tell of her claim? In a hundred guesses not one present would have pronounced his name.

"The first picture gradually grows clearer as my mind concentrates itself," Walter began. "It portrays the past. It shows — let me see —" he bent closer to the ball as though studying it, "— ah! yes, now it grows plain before my eyes — a heaving, tossing waste of angry black water with waves towering mountain high. I see a ship in dire distress. I see a frail raft on which is lashed the wave-washed body of a woman,— nay, a mere girl. On the sinking ship a man stands, preparing to join the girl. Ah! He makes the attempt; but even as he seeks to grasp the raft it is whirled away and disappears from his sight — forever."

The audience shivered. There was dead silence in the room. Every eye clung to the speaker's face in fascination. One or two wondered, irritably, why such a grewsome number was added to the programme. It was a gala night, not a funeral; this would put them all out of touch with the spirit of the occasion, even though it was all nonsense. Nevertheless they bent forward eagerly at his next words.

"The second picture portrays the present." Then

he went on in short, vivid description. His voice broke once, and he regained his self-control only after valiant effort. "I see this picture growing more and more distinct before my eyes; this time not the lifeless body of a young girl, the plaything of an angry ocean! No, thank God! I see the young girl again, but safe in harbor; nay more, beloved, surrounded by tender, motherly care, thanks to the Christ-like compassion of one of God's own saints, a member of this very club of women banded together to act as His emissaries to the poor and needy. I see the man also rescued from the waves, returning, not to a life of solitary mourning but to his dear one, to home, to happiness."

This picture produced a decided sensation. Glance sought glance inquiringly. That this weird crystal gazing meant something definite, something concrete, was dawning upon them, but what? Who was this gaunt stranger with the bright, piercing eyes, whose clothes hung upon his loose-jointed frame much as ordinary clothes would deck a skeleton? And who the girl whose body had been at the mercy of wind and wave? The silence was so tense one could almost "hear one's own thoughts" as an excitable member expressed it afterwards. But no one spoke; no faintest whisper broke the hush that had fallen upon them.

"The third and last picture my beloved crystal shows, portrays the future," the solemn voice broke in on their curious self-communing. "Rising before me, stone on stone, I see a goodly building. It is surrounded by stretches of lawn, croquet grounds

and tennis courts. Within its home-like portals — I am privileged to mount the stairs, you know — I see a large assembly hall, a well-stocked reading-room, a comfortable rest-room, a tea-room. The ground floor shows a gymnasium, with space for basket-ball and hockey, a running-track, also a bowling alley, and a swimming-tank." He held the ball closer to his eyes and peered intently into its depths, adding: "Yes! I am right! Here is a group of lads just verging into manhood, enjoying these things with all the vigor of youthful spirits. But I mount the stairs again! The top floor shows a different picture. I wish you could see it all as I do; the cheerful rooms equipped for cooking, for sewing, for games, and the dainty little lassies that are busy in them — a sight worth seeing, I assure you! The whole place seems to be a veritable hive of useful activity and helpful play. As I leave the building, I read on a tablet in the entrance hall, this inscription:

THE WOMAN'S PHILANTHROPIC CLUB
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE
OF
A DEED OF WOMANLY MERCY.

All this my crystal shows me, friends, and its prophecies never fail, never!"

For a moment no one moved, no one spoke. Then as the meaning of the strange picture became clear to them, a tumult of applause arose under whose cover several of the more earnest workers furtively wiped their eyes. Gradually an explanation of the other picture dawned upon them. Miss Mystery

must be the girl of the shipwreck scene, and this man — who was he? What relation was he to her?

Arthur Courtland and the doctor had both noted Mystery's arrival with the stranger. Both had experienced the same keen throb of disappointment earlier in the evening when the family appeared without her. From opposite corners of the hall they watched her, wondering who her escort could be. That he was simply a chance guest of the Porters they dismissed instantly; the exalted look in her eyes as she raised them to his, precluded the comforting thought. That look could mean but one thing: the solving of her life's riddle. This was some one come to claim her. Her brother? They searched anxiously for even a faint resemblance upon which to base the relationship, but each in turn was compelled to abandon that explanation, satisfactory as it would have been.

The audience was edging its way forward, eager to meet the possessor of the wonderful crystal and thank him for his generous gift; still more eager to learn more of the shipwreck and rescue. It was a joyous throng that pressed towards the platform, but in its midst were two strained, anxious faces whose dread the mask of conventionality was all too flimsy to disguise.

In spite of a wild desire for flight, Walter tried to stand to his guns. Manlike he hated to be "gushed over," or even thanked, yet a power beyond his control had driven him to this public acknowledgment of the great debt he owed to Mrs. Porter, a debt that no clubhouse, however perfect, could pay.

Then too, there lurked in the dimmer recesses of his mind the feeling that he must place the stranger who had so mysteriously come into their midst on her proper plane; a nameless waif no longer, but his wife, beloved and honored. He was man of the world enough to know that the merciful stand taken by Mrs. Porter and others of her kind would not be the stand of the suburb at large; that there must have been cavilers all too ready to sneer at kindly accountings for the girl's forlorn condition. This justified, to his mind, his sensational part in the evening's programme.

But in spite of the sound common sense that had dictated his course, when the avalanche that resulted threatened to overpower him, he beckoned to Mystery and unblushingly took refuge behind her smiling serenity, reiterating nervously, in response to the thanks showered upon him: "You're welcome. You're welcome. But it's not my gift, remember; it's Mother Porter's!"

"And Miss Mystery's," Mrs. Porter supplemented, pressing the girl close to her side.

"Mrs. Mystery," Walter corrected hurriedly. If "Arthur and the doctor" were in that audience, he didn't propose to leave any room for misunderstanding. From then on he surveyed each one who approached with critical eye, wondering whether he would recognize the disturbing pair without an introduction. He did, by intuition; for when Courtland bent over Mystery's slender white hand and uttered the conventional congratulations, Walter realized instantly that here was a man to whom the

evening brought nothing of joy save the vicarious joy in a loved one's happiness. And when the doctor, following close in Arthur's wake — misery loves company — gazed into Mystery's upraised eyes, there was a look of renunciation upon his strong face that Walter viewed with a throb of pity. For a fleeting instant he turned inquiringly towards his wife. Had she, unfettered as she supposed herself, been able to resist the love that shone in those two faces? Suppose — He forebore to finish the thought; it made him feel weak, impotent. But a glance at her face as it was upraised to his answered him. It was glorified by love — her love for him! Doubt fled forever. He was satisfied. An unvoiced pæan of praise ascended to the God of mercy who had so richly blessed his life.

Later in the evening Courtland spoke to him in the frank, manly way that was characteristic of him, albeit his utterances were somewhat disconnected.

"Make her happy, Husted; she deserves it. I — I coveted the chance myself, but — well I might never have succeeded even if — But it's all right, old man. She's come into her own at last."

When they were leaving, Dr. Guthrie also unburdened himself to Walter in the seclusion of a dark corner of the steps, where they both happened to stop for the same purpose — to light their cigars. He had been the Warrens' physician, years ago.

"She's one in a million, that little wife of yours," he began gruffly. "See that you take good care of her, young fellow, or you'll have me to settle with."

"I promise, doctor," Walter replied earnestly,

not at all angry at the older man's assumption of authority. "If I can only care for her from now on as well as you did up to this time, I'll be satisfied. I owe you a debt that can never be repaid."

"Yes, it can," the doctor contradicted bluntly; "by your treatment of her. This confounded suburb has a tongue that wags in and out of season," he went on bravely, "so I suppose you know by this time that I'd have taken the contract myself — caring for — her, I mean. In fact I didn't intend to withdraw my bid, no matter how many younger and handsomer competitors entered the lists, but a husband — well, I guess he'll be awarded the contract, all right, as long as he can qualify and put up the necessary bond. Only he'd better live up to the terms of the contract," he added fiercely, "or by the Almighty — I beg your pardon, but I — she — she's such a little bit of a girl! Look here, Warren — Husted — whatever your name is — if it were not for her joy, and he who runs can read that, I'd be almost tempted to wish that you'd stayed at the bottom of the sea — almost, but not quite; must be confoundedly damp down there! Anyhow, it might have been — some one else, even if you had; but still — oh, well! I guess I'll have to take my medicine. Good night!"

After it was all over, explanations, congratulations, feast and frolic, a happy little group gathered about the cheery fire in the shabby old sitting-room, to "talk it over!" It ended by their "thinking it over," instead; their hearts were too full for utterance.

"And when I remember that you took her in," Walter broke the silence at last; "took in a total stranger, and cared for her, cherished her — oh! I can't even find words to thank you for it! I hope the Lord will let me live to repay you — not with money," he added hurriedly, as he caught a glimpse of Mrs. Porter's startled face, and noted Aunt Mig's involuntary movement of dissent. "Money can never repay such a debt — but with a life's loving service."

"Two lives' loving service, dear!" Mystery corrected him gently. Leaving the shelter of his arm — it seemed as though he had to feel her near him to be fully assured it was not merely a happy dream that his wife was alive and well beside him — she slipped down to her knees at Mrs. Porter's side and raised her glowing young face reverently to the kindly old one. A glorified face it was. Mrs. Porter leaned over and kissed it. "Two lives' loving service, mother," she repeated tremulously; "and the debt still unpaid!"

THE END

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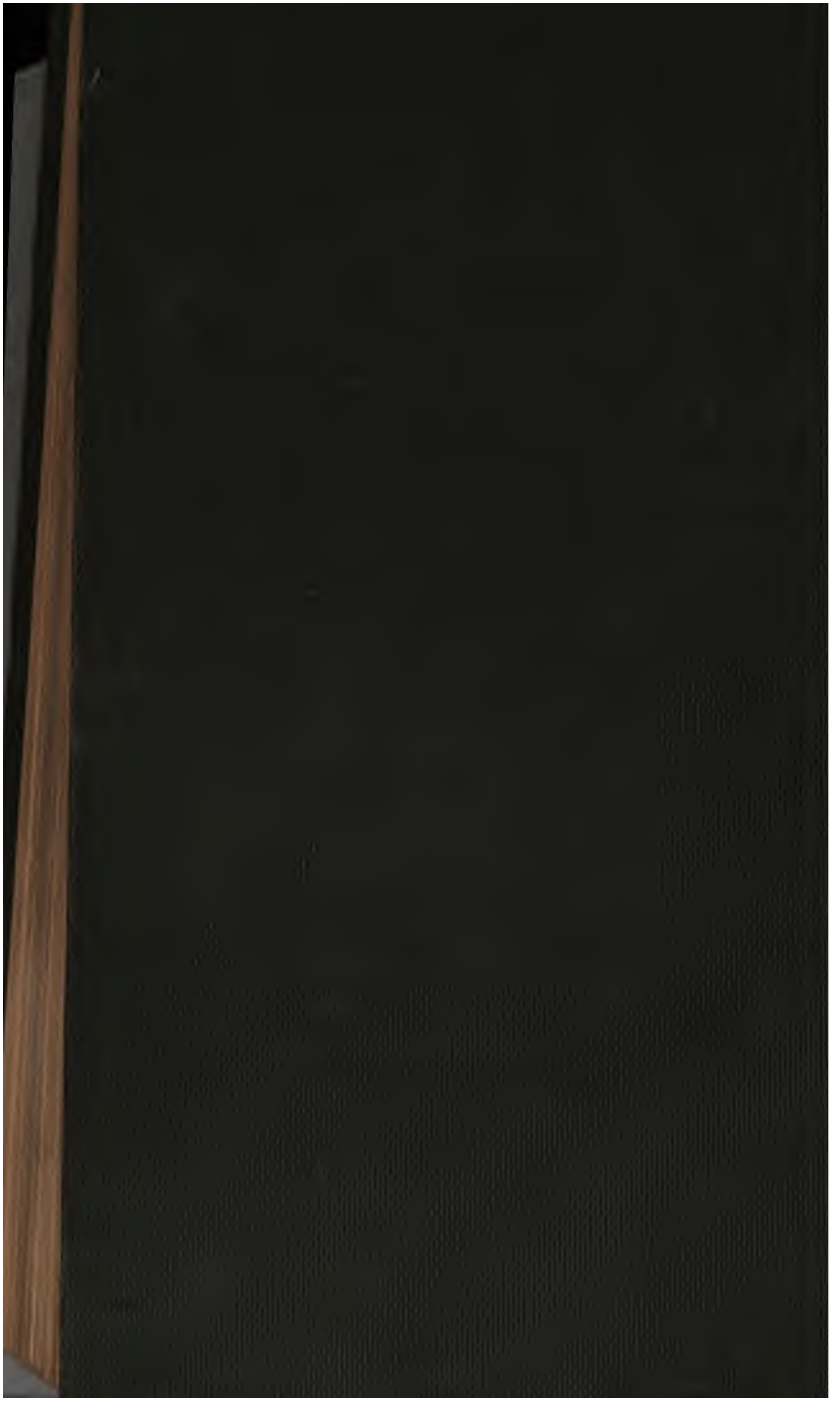
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